HUGE HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE! 50 TOP GAMES & GEAR

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

JANUARY 2003 ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

HANDS-ON PREVIEW!

TRON 2.0

NEW LIGHT CYCLES! WORLD'S FIRST LOOK

Take the ride of your life on Monolith's dazzling new shooter!

Age of Mythology Reviewed!

The final word on the last great RTS

REVIEWED & RATED

Year's Best Shooters

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Unreal Tournament 2003
Hitman 2 • Battlefield 1942
America's Army

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DJ Red Beret is in da house spinning the latest barbershop remixes!
She's really fine! At times like these, I wish I had gone to dance camp!
This party is groovy! I better call the others and get them over here!

You said it, Pa!
Then the pink thingy to the blue thingy.
I'd always thought that "mind over matter" was a crock; who'd have guessed!
Boy, for some reason I feel at home here...

I finally got tickets to this movie! Wait, this doesn't look like a movie.
Wow, all this competition just to win one hundred jelly beans...how funny!

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Mature Sexual Themes
Mild Violence

Game experience may change during online play.

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RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

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RP

The wait is over. Master of Orion 3 has finally landed and it's unlike anything you've ever experienced. 16 unique alien races vie for domination of the galaxy through diplomacy, deception or just plain brute force. Are you good enough to rule the galaxy? Find out with the triumphant return of the most challenging strategy game in the universe. www.moo3.com

MATURE
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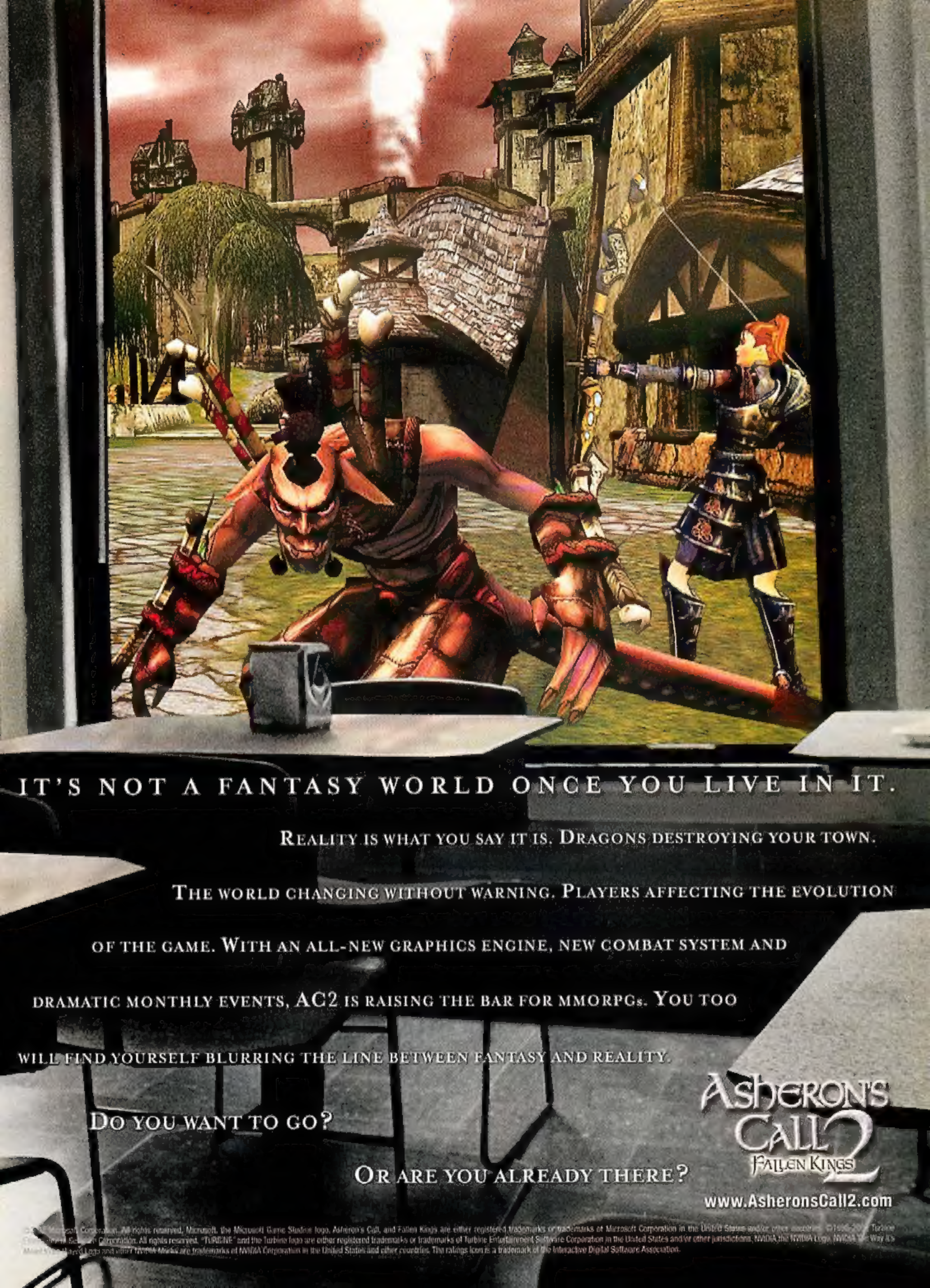
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Violence
Blood
Microsoft
game studios
TURBINE
NVIDIA
The way it's meant to be played



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"...the game looks amazing – the explosions, detonations, and other effects are spectacular."
–Computer Games–
Disney's
Treasure Planet
Battle at Procyon
Brilliant
Disney Interactive
www.disneyinteractive.com
PC CD ROM
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

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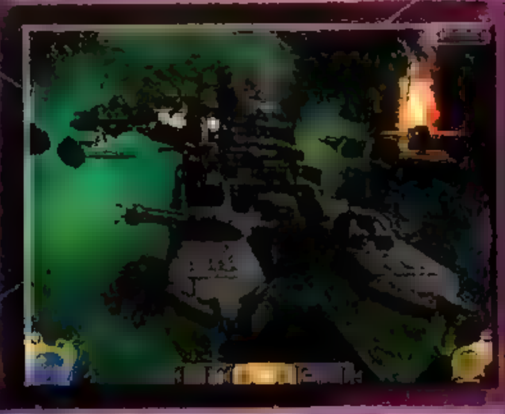


Ships and weapons like you've never seen

"...it's a swashbuckling good time."
–Computer Gaming World–

[illegible] combat with powerful adversaries

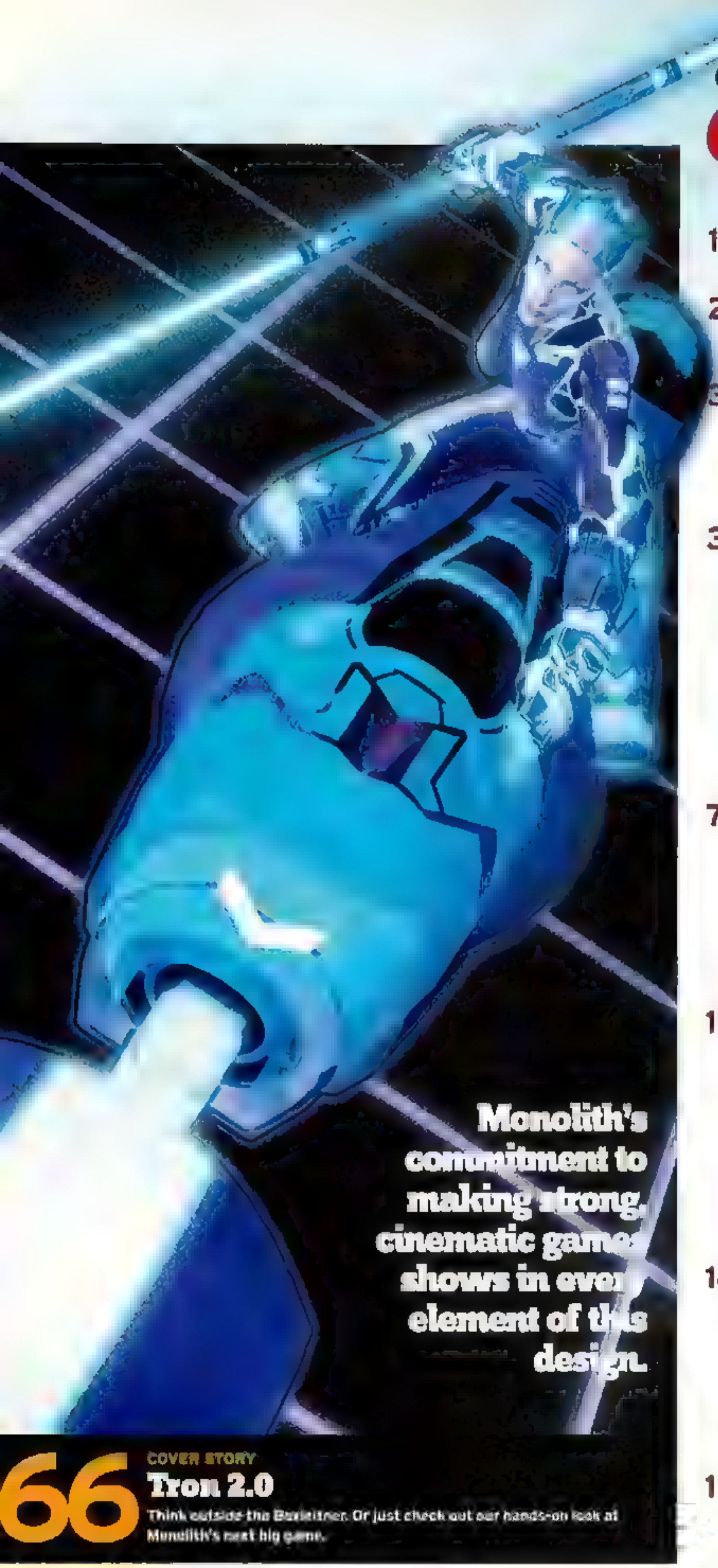
"...the six full servings of multiplayer should more than accommodate even the most gluttonous of gamers."
–IGN–

[illegible] multiplayer combat

"Treasure Planet is Disney's surprise gem for the holidays."
–Computer Games–

[illegible]

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
January 2003 Issue #222



Monolith's commitment to making strong, cinematic games shows in every element of this design.

COVER STORY
66 **Tron 2.0**
Think outside the Berkeliner. Or just check out our hands-on look at Monolith's next big game.

14 **Editorial**
Jeff's up front now, but he's still a big dork.

20 **Letters**
This month: More *CGW* lovin', a few peaceniks, and a guest appearance by Joseph Stalin.

30 **Loading...**
In deep space or knee-deep in s***, we've got some gorgeous shots this month. More outer space adventure with **Freelancer** and a recruiting post-err-render from **Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder** expansion pack.

36 **Read Me**
Holy crap! Palestinians play games, too, but they're not the same shooters you play. See the Arab world's answer to **Soldier of Fortune**. Plus, take a first look at **Hannibal**, the game based on *The Silence of the Lambs*. It puts the lotion on the magazine! Oh boy, now we've gone too far....

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78 **Holiday Gift Guide ▸**
Gift Guide. Shove this guide in your relatives' hands and worry not about Aunt Flo giving you a copy of **Daikatana** for Christmas, Chanukah, or Kwanzaa.

128 **Tech**
This month Wil brings you the 10th Annual Ultimate Gaming Machine. So what happens when a black guy from Oakland gets his hands on seven top-notch rigs from a variety of manufacturers? Well, you'll have to read on to find out. Oh yeah, of course there's a Wil Power.

141 **Gamer's Edge**
Get out your lipstick, boys—it's time to take care of the bad guys in one of **NOLF2**'s toughest missions, Double Cross. Also, Bruce and Tom head back to the battlefield in **Medieval: Total War**, and Encyclopedia WarCraftica continues with tips for the Undead in all of us. Plus, everyone's favorite, the dirty trick.

156 **Scorched Earth ▸**
You hate me, you really really hate me

HATE BAR
NASTY
NOT GOOD
BAD

[illegible] basing and loot-losing early hours of EQ.

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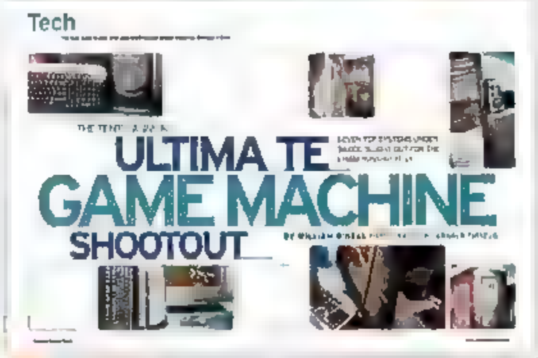
36 **READ ME**
Palestinian gamers take up their virtual arms.



Tech

THE ULTIMATE GAME MACHINE SHOOTOUT

128 **TECH**
And the winner is...

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Two fully developed races
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Violence

A LITTLE MORE:
a) Exciting
b) Dangerous
c) Crowded
[✓ d) All of the above]
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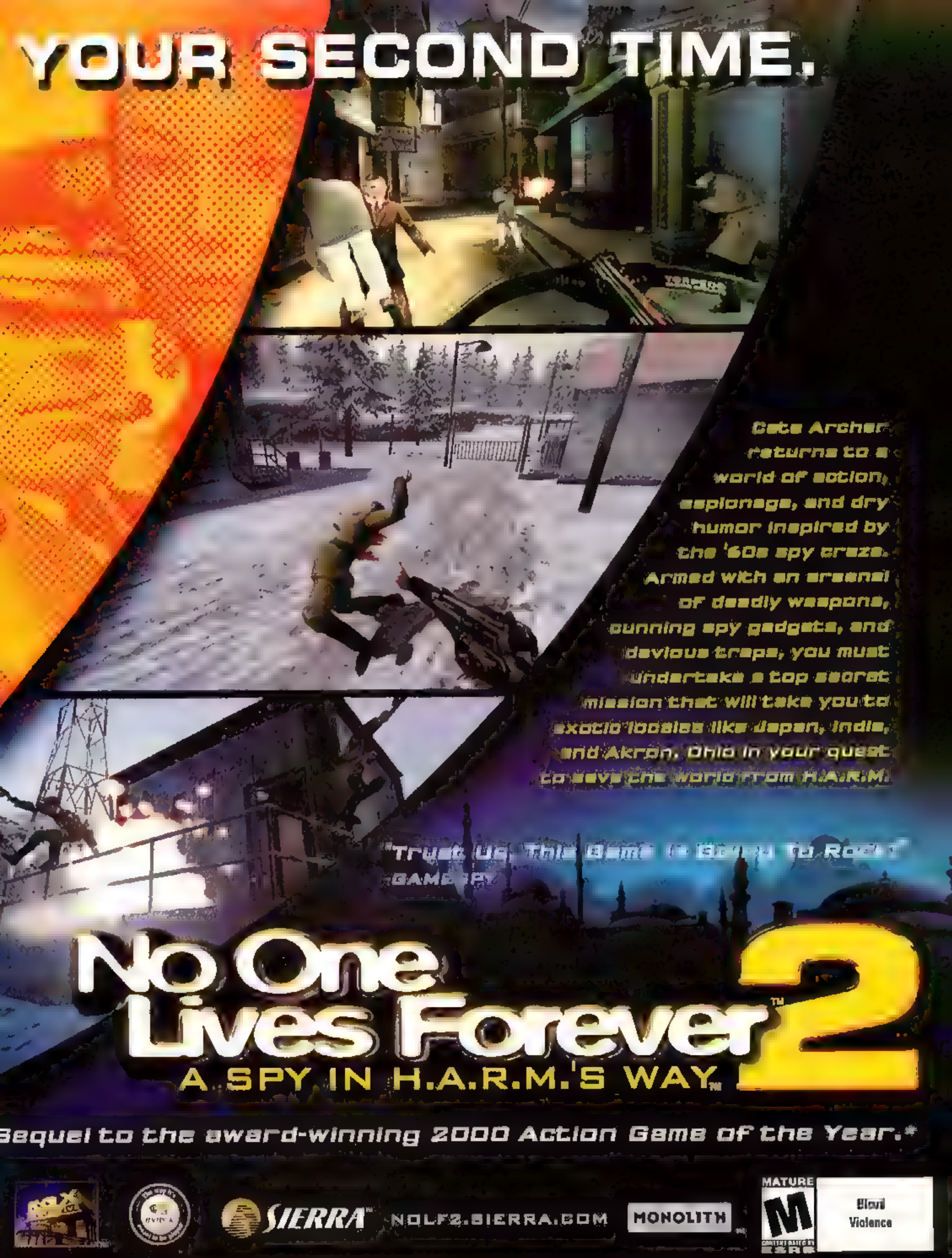
YOUR SECOND TIME.
"Trust Us, This Game is Going to Rock"
GAMESPY
No One Lives Forever 2
A SPY IN H.A.R.M.'S WAY
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MONOLITH
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Violence

Cate Archer returns to a world of action, espionage, and dry humor inspired by the '60s spy craze. Armed with an arsenal of deadly weapons, cunning spy gadgets, and devious traps, you must undertake a top secret mission that will take you to exotic locales like Japan, India, and Akron, Ohio in your quest to save the world from H.A.R.M.

Sequel to the award-winning 2000 Action Game of the Year.*

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Speak, Green

Dang, I guess I'm writing a column after all

OK, so let's get this out of the way first: No, this isn't the Hebrew edition of *Computer Gaming World*. Longtime readers may be used to seeing my saggy jowls on the back page of this magazine, but that's all over now. You'll find me up here from now on, assuming my rightful place at the front of each issue, where I can gaze down from my Hello Kitty-brand pink plastic throne and pontificate mightily on all I see. Huzzah.

This month, we decided once again to go ahead and make another magazine. What the heck. It was either that or watch *The Two Towers* trailer online over and over, which, actually, is what most of us did anyway. The rest of the time, we put together two of our big annual features: the Ultimate Game Machine (now celebrating its 10th anniversary) and our holiday gift guide. Tech editor Wil O'Neal really had to work this month to get the Ultimate Game Machine story together, instead of drunkenly pulling his pants down every day at the Beale Street Bar so do him a favor and give it a read.

> **This month we decided to go ahead and make a magazine.**

The gift guide isn't necessarily for you, since we know you already know what you want—it's more for your lame parents, spouse, or significant other, all of whom may remain sadly clueless as to what constitutes a good game. Just so you know, our gift guide choices were limited to those games we'd actually played, knew were cool, and knew for certain would be on the shelves in December. If not for all that, *Duke Nukem Forever* would've made it for sure.

Our cover story, *Tron 2.0*, is about a game we first responded to with a collective "yikes" (uh, a game based on a mediocre 20-year-old Disney movie?), until we learned it was being developed by Monolith, the extremely talented developers behind *Aliens Versus Predator 2* and *No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way* (reviewed in this issue on page 100). By now, you've probably seen from other sources how awesome this game looks, but we actually got to play it and got the world's first look at one of the game's centerpieces: the lightcycles. So if you think you've read about *Tron 2.0* before, forget it. This is a story with, you know, some actual content in it.

Finally, a word about the fellow replacing me on the back page. Robert Coffey is a mutant. I don't know how else to explain it. He's hilarious, he's scary, he's obsessed with fish, and he can write circles around almost anyone alive. He's more than equipped to fill my moldy shoes. Be nice to him, or you'll regret it.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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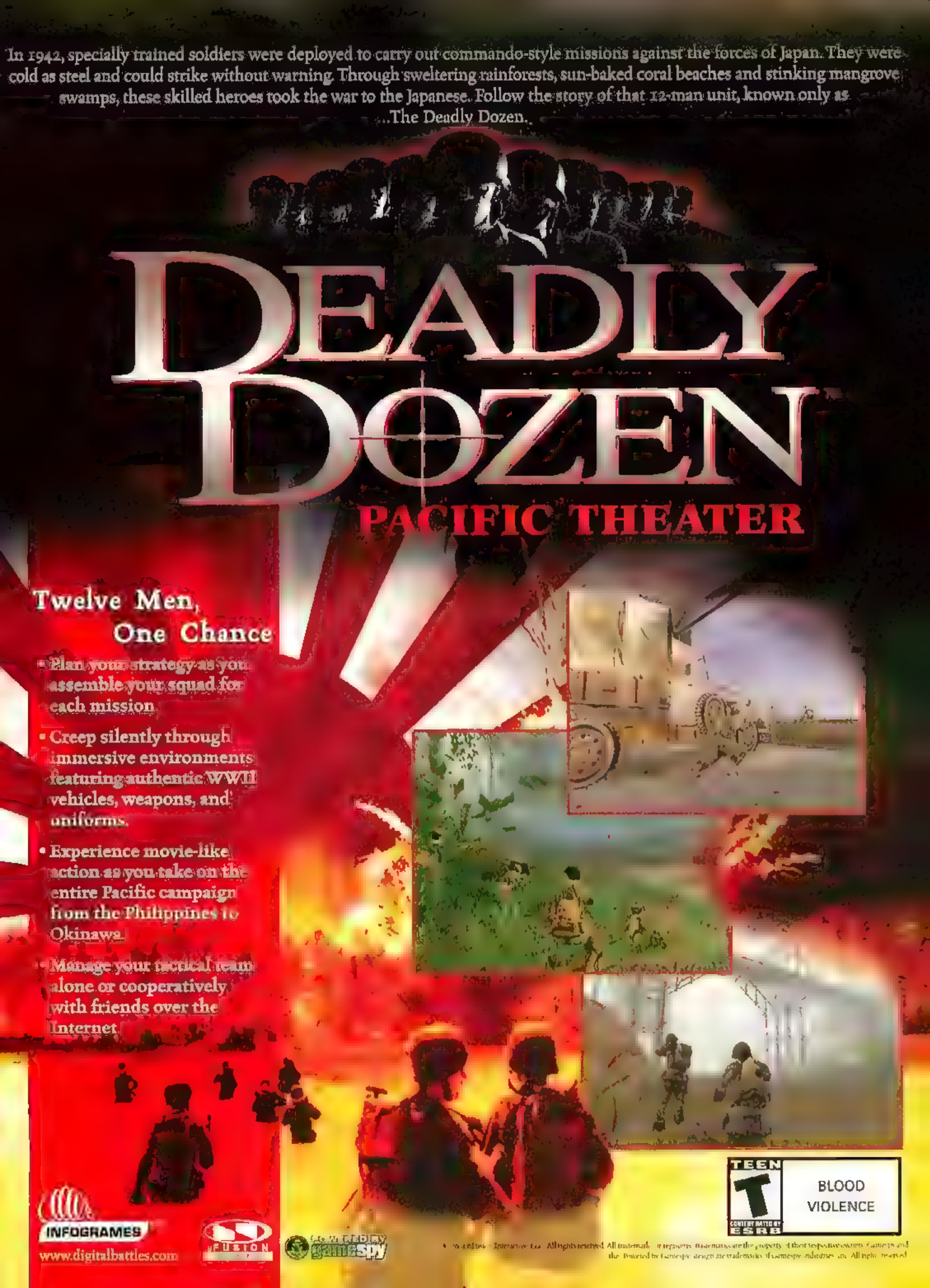
DEADLY DOZEN
PACIFIC THEATER
Twelve Men, One Chance
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
BLOOD
VIOLENCE
INFOGRAMES
FUSION
gamespy

In 1942, specially trained soldiers were deployed to carry out commando-style missions against the forces of Japan. They were cold as steel and could strike without warning. Through sweltering rainforests, sun-baked coral beaches and stinking mangrove swamps, these skilled heroes took the war to the Japanese. Follow the story of that 12-man unit, known only as ...The Deadly Dozen.

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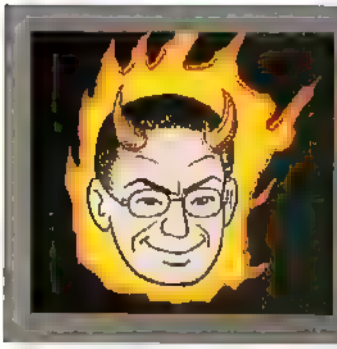

ROBERT COFFEY

After a promising career waiting tables and writing pornography, executive editor Robert Coffey chucked aside the glamour of singing pasta and typing smut for an [illegible] [illegible] the meantime, he's settling for driving away advertisers and [illegible] back page this month). Start writing cancellation letters now.

TOM PRICE

You don't have old Tom to kick around anymore. Well, actually, yes, you do. Despite leaving *CGW* after four years (yikes!) for a new gaming magazine in the Ziff Davis family, Tom will continue to write scathing reviews of popular games and field your subsequent hate mail. He leaves on a positive note, though, with a glowing, happy, kissy-face review of *Battlefield 1942* (page 116).

RAPHAEL LIBERATORE

Don't mess with Raphael (*Ghost Recon: Island Thunder* and [illegible] and martial arts before earning history and political science degrees at the University of California, and is currently completing his masters degree in low intensity conflict specializing in counterterrorism. Raphael served with the U.S. Army Special Forces as a weapons and communications specialist. Though currently on medical leave, he remains active in the Special Operations community. He also runs a Mac gaming website (www.clanmacgaming.com).

JOHN UELAND

John Ueland has been illustrating professionally for more than 10 years and would rather be riding his bike, but hey, the art pays the bills. His work has been seen in several design and illustration annuals; clients include Burger King, Microsoft, *Time*, *Esquire*, Pepsi, and *Business Week*. John was pleased to be working on such a large project (the Holiday Gift Guide) with fellow Chico State alumnus Rob Schultz.

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the threat

WORDS LIKE:
"CARPET BOMBING," "SCUD LAUNCHERS"

By PETER CROSBY

Recent military aggressions around the globe have many nation's worried. Between the United States, China and the Global Liberation Army, tensions run high. Their leaders profess no interest in escalating the situation, but words ring hollow when satellite photos tell a different story. The issue is no longer *"Will* there be military conflict?" but, "Who will *prevail?"*

[illegible]

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Violence

PC
CD
ROM

[illegible]

THE WILD CARD:
Despite inferior military resources, the GLA still poses a very credible threat to worldwide security.

[illegible]

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE:
Despite the difference in resources, all three forces achieve an eerie kind of parity. The GLA's low-tech approach is no less effective than either China's superior forces or America's advanced technologies.

AND "TOMAHAWK MISSILES."

COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS

[illegible]

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Letters

Let's hear it for the boy at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Get Regular With *CGW*

I would like to extend a great debt of gratitude to the members of *CGW*. There was a time long, long ago when going to the bathroom was a chore. It required going in to the smelly, dirty laundry-filled room, sitting on the can, and waiting (for what seemed like hours) for my body to be done. No more. Now my time in the bathroom is quite possibly the best time in my day. All thanks to *CGW*. You provide some of the greatest bathroom reading I have had in my entire life. Now, if the rest of the family would stop yelling at me to get out of the bathroom, life would be perfect. Thanks guys.

Pat Chace

Because we hate ourselves?

Why do you people put yourselves through this? Endless complaints and incoherent rants are wasting space and do nothing but breed negative opinions about your magazine. Six months ago I considered *Computer Gaming World* to be the end-all-be-all of gaming magazines, but after reading some of the letters you print, I'm beginning to change my mind.

But I don't want to! I love loving your magazine and everything you do, but your readers' constant criticisms of your insulting lack of competence is causing me to lose respect for you. What you need is some good old-fashioned Stalinism.

That's right. Stalinism. You need to spread the "Big Lie." You need to print only what supports you and recycle bin the rest. Feed us propaganda. You know we want it, but without it we'll cancel our subscriptions. Make us love you. Make us think you're gods. Make us want to re-subscribe five times a year just because we can. If you can do that you'll have what you used to have: returning subscribers and angry Canadians. I guess some things will never change.

Keshno

Yeah, we do tend to accentuate the negative around here. It's all an offshoot of Jeff Green's self-loathing. So, here, we'll spread the love in a few letters below.

They love CGW! Yay!

OK, here are the facts. I love playing games. Also, when it comes to playing games, I stink. My 10-year-old son can beat me any day of the week. I don't care. Games are still a thrill.

How valuable is your magazine to me? First, if a game has not been reviewed, I will not even consider buying it. I am not talking about a PREview, I mean REview. I do not have unlimited funds. $49.99 for great cover art or an interesting title? I don't think so. Second, if a game does not receive at least 3 stars, it will never see my hard drive. Why should I spend time with games which are substandard. There are more 3, 4, and 5 star games than I will ever be able to play or complete. Finally, I keep all old issues. Great games are still great games, even if I haven't had an opportunity to play them. While I am blasting my way through my current entertainment of choice, an equally good masterpiece is only becoming more affordable. (Isn't that the point of Dumpster Diver?) I research those games in the bargain bin by looking up old reviews in previous issues. Then I purchase two copies at a great value. I cannot tell you how much fun it is to fly over the Pacific with my son as my wingman. How valuable is your magazine to me? It helps me have a blast and not waste my cash doing it.

Steve Broesder

I've seen many people complain about some of the content in your magazine. I think they are wrong. I love your magazine because of its random humor. Especially Jeff Green. His columns make you feel sorry for him. I canceled my other magazine subscription because I found this a lot better than the other one.

Rob

Hello *CGW*! I have been a reader of your mag for many years. You are the joy that comes into my mailbox once a month, and I can indulge my gaming self. Thanks to you I buy the good games. Thanks to you I can tell my friends whether a game is good or not. If anyone says you suck, they're either

"What you at *CGW* need is some good old-fashioned Stalinism."

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM VANDERHOOF

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MAIL BITES

Thank you very much, I love you! Can I marry you guys? I want to marry someone from CGW!!! Better if it is a girl. But a guy is OK, too!!!!!

Mike

I have one thing and one thing only to say: Forget Superman, get me some Jeff Green underoos.

Snube

Since you won't terminate William O'Neal, I must assume that your magazine aspires to his level of off-subject drivel, and I therefore terminate you by withdrawing my readership.

Ruby B.

"A game designed to recruit people into the military is absolutely evil."

immature or are the "get a life" guys. One of the greatest mags is your September 2001 and the *Neverwinter Nights* issue. Jeff Green, you are awesome. Don't stop writing! And one word to all the gamers out there: Don't dis Xbox, PS2, or GameCube. The true gamer cherishes all systems and plays them to their greatest extent.

mR.gRIM

America's Army: Evil?

A few fellow gamers and I believe that the game *America's Army* is the worst thing that ever happened! A game that is designed to recruit young people into the military is absolutely evil. Your support for this game is appalling and goes against everything the gaming community is about. Young people may be killed for real because they're being sold on the idea that war is a game. Please stop supporting and advertising this game.

Ronald Phair

I saw your little comment in the December 2002 issue Pipeline *America's Army: Attack on Iraq* by Bushsoft due Q2 2003. Let's hope that this "game" turns out to be vaporware, à la *Duke Nukem Forever*. However, if hawk-like minds do prevail, I hope the developers get it right and release a AAA title instead of a bug-ridden tragedy that has the potential to be the end of us all.

Michael A. Hawash

Age of Mythology

All you guys who write bad letters about *CGW*: shut up! Please give George Jones a pat on the back for getting his *Age of Mythology* article totally right [December 2002]. I've said to my friends (avid RTS gamers) that the content for RTS games is getting stale. Heck, I'm only 14 and I notice it. I'm not saying it's all gone, I'm just agreeing with Mr. Jones that it's getting old. Only the graphics are changing. *WarCraft III* is the first RTS game that, in my opinion, has anything new–RPG elements–but soon all RTS games will have that, too. So, thanks to George Jones for getting it right. I'm renewing.

Star_Slayer

You guys have had me drooling over *Age of Mythology* for the past 4 months! How did you do it? I had no idea that it was going to be developed, but after I saw just one advertisement in your mag, I was mesmerized by it. And the voices in my head tell me it is good. The voices also say Jeff Green must die!!!! Uh...keep up the good work.

GeckoWarrior6789@aol.com

LAST
GREAT
RTS

Department of Corrections

I enjoyed reading your article on *Ultima Online* [November 2002]! But I wanted to offer a minor clarification. You stated that I was *UO*'s creative director. In fact, I was credited as "creative lead" and later "lead designer" on *UO*, but never held the title "creative director." Starr Long was the project director.

Raph Koster
Creative Director
Star Wars Galaxies
Sony Online Entertainment

Thanks for the clarification, Raph. Now quit reading our magazine and finish *Star Wars Galaxies*.

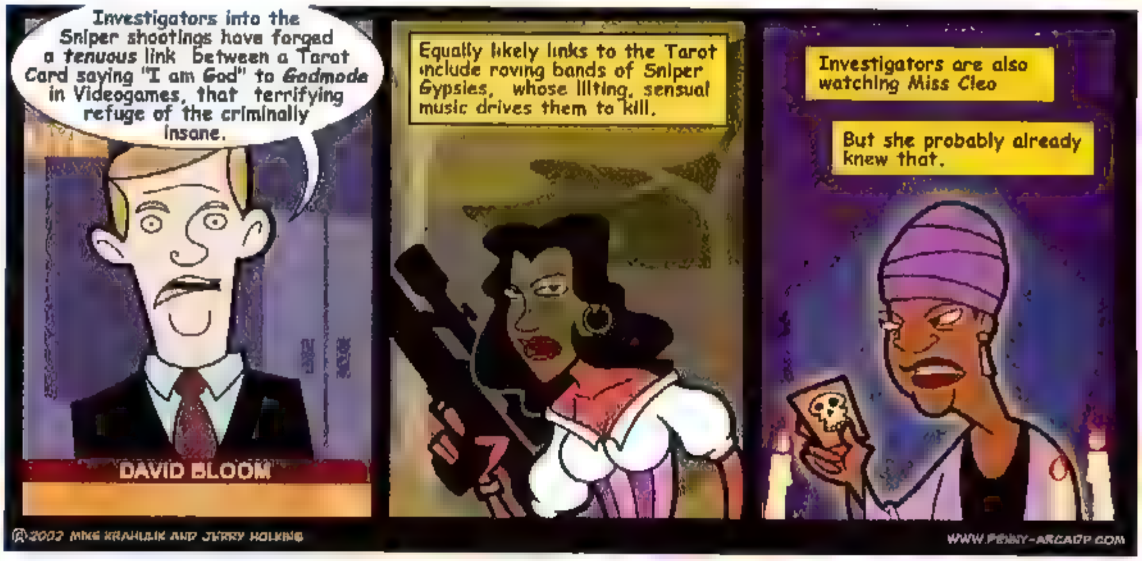
In your Letters page [November 2002], you botched the best line from the great *This Is Spinal Tap*. In the letter from the Druid-hating dude, your title should be "Nobody knows who they were, or what they were DOING," not "Where they were going." The original line isn't jump-off-the-page funny, but it always struck me as absurdly hilarious.

Being a Canadian and all. Great issue!

Mike Stafford

Ugh. You're right. We hang our heads in shame. That mistake truly went to 11.

Penny Arcade BY MIKE KRAHULIK AND JERRY HOLKINS


Investigators into the Sniper shootings have forged a *tenuous* link between a Tarot Card saying "I am God" to *Godmode* in Videogames, that terrifying refuge of the criminally insane.
DAVID BLOOM
Equally likely links to the Tarot include roving bands of Sniper Gypsies, whose lilting, sensual music drives them to kill.
Investigators are also watching Miss Cleo
But she probably already knew that.
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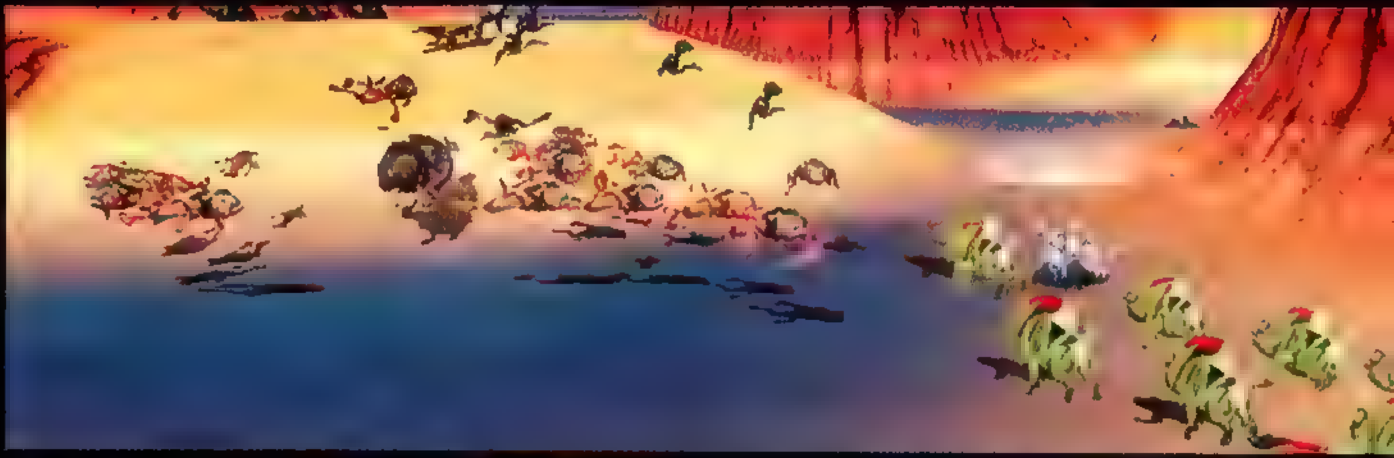
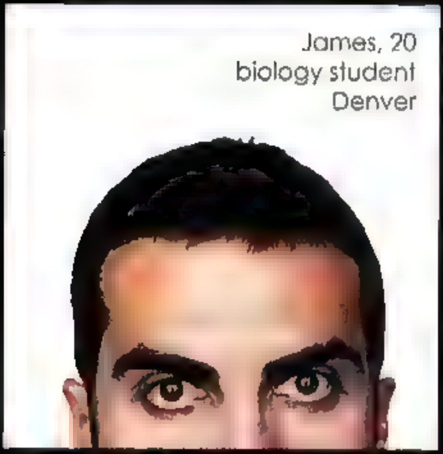
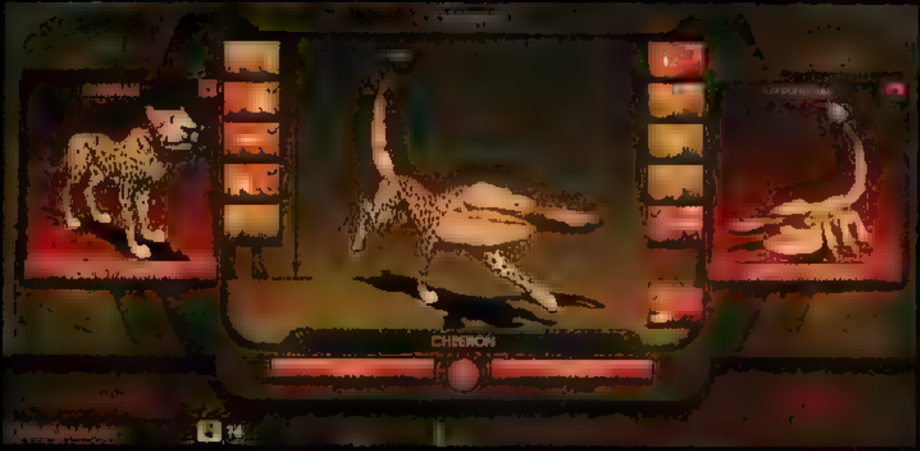


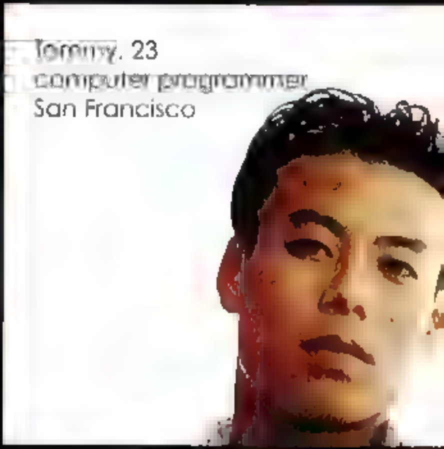


James, 20
biology student
Denver

Jessie the Kid: let's face it. The only good Pirawolf is a dead Pirawolf. 😉

You need to have balance. A good air combat squadron of Vulturesharks, plus a battalion of Hyenadragons, and finally, Turtlelions for the amphibious fights. "Snakes and snails with scorpion tails." These are what real men are made of.





Tommy, 23
computer programmer
San Francisco

TEEN
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Violence
Comic Mischief
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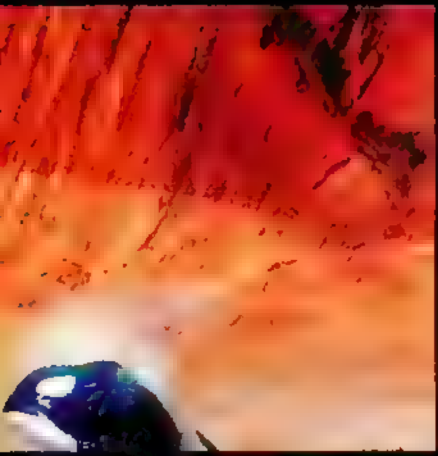
BY AN ARMY OF PIRAWOLVES WOLF).... WHAT WILL YOU DO?



cjm1565: send in my goons. Eagorillas and Rhinobulls.

These boys will punish anything. If the French had them, they wouldn't have needed us in WWII.

END OF STORY, BIZATCH!

Craig, 22
pro skateboarder/slacker
Providence

Tom Tom: let's just say,

MAJOR PAIN IN THE...;)

A Tigebra is pretty wicked, or a Tiganzee. Haven't tried a tiger and a rhino yet.

My bet is it terminates with extreme prejudice. I like that.

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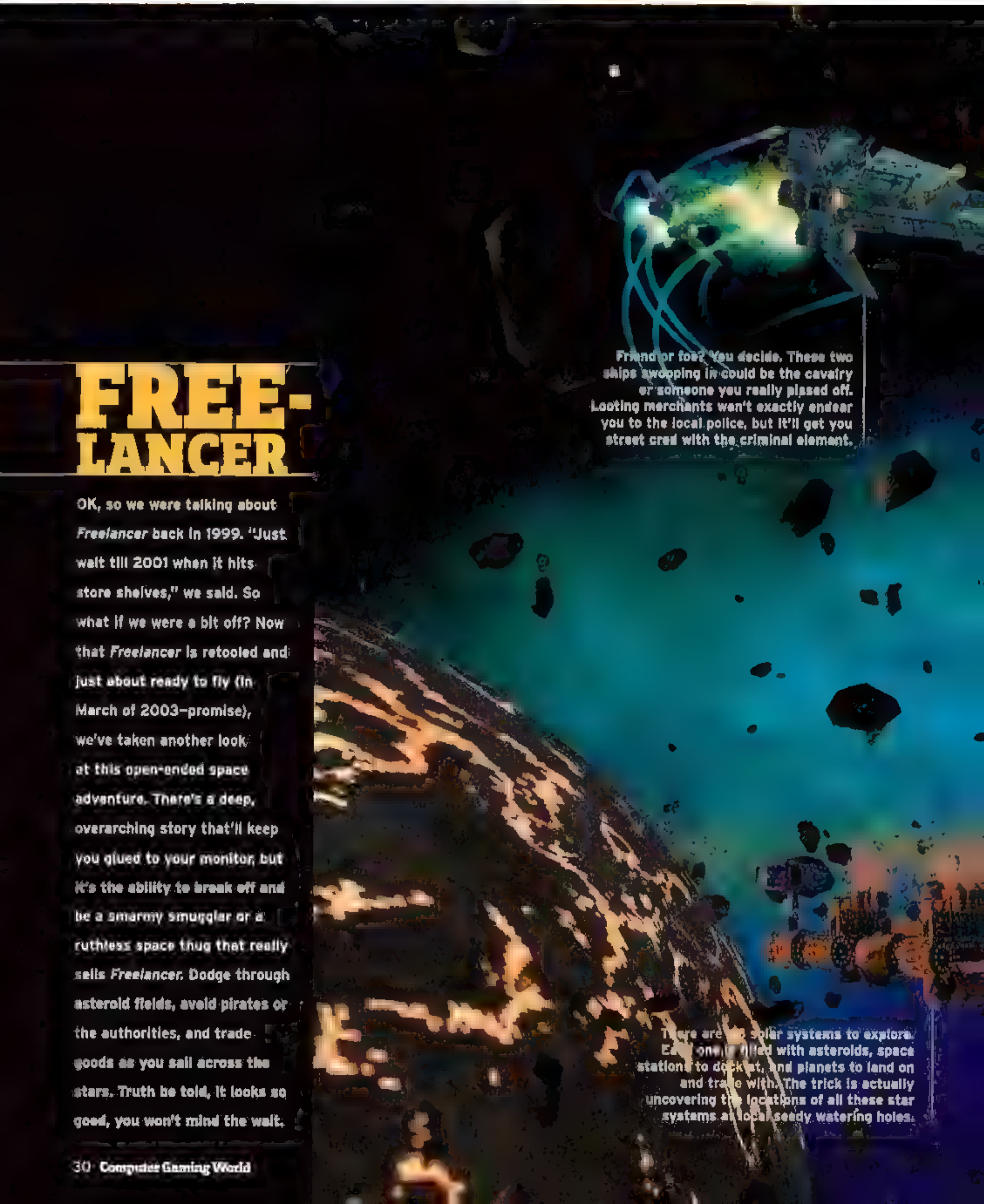
The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Darren Gladstone



Friend or foe? You decide. These two ships swooping in could be the cavalry or someone you really pissed off. Looting merchants won't exactly endear you to the local police, but it'll get you street cred with the criminal element.

There are [illegible] solar systems to explore. Each one is filled with asteroids, space stations to dock at, and planets to land on and trade with. The trick is actually uncovering the locations of all these star systems at local seedy watering holes.

FREE-LANCER

OK, so we were talking about *Freelancer* back in 1999. "Just wait till 2001 when it hits store shelves," we said. So what if we were a bit off? Now that *Freelancer* is retooled and just about ready to fly (in March of 2003—promise), we've taken another look at this open-ended space adventure. There's a deep, overarching story that'll keep you glued to your monitor, but it's the ability to break off and be a smarmy smuggler or a ruthless space thug that really sells *Freelancer*. Dodge through asteroid fields, avoid pirates or the authorities, and trade goods as you sail across the stars. Truth be told, it looks so good, you won't mind the wait.

No need to fly solo, Han. With the multiplayer mode, you can tackle various missions with a buddy, build up a trading cartel, or just find someone to race on your own Kessel runs.

You've got the right to bear arms—a whole lot of 'em to be exact. You'll have more than 400 different components you can patch your ships with.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER

No, this isn't a recruiting poster (good guess, though). This is actually a render of the new expansion pack for *Ghost Recon*. The new Tom Clancy sortie takes you deep into Cuba to ensure that a democratic election goes off without a hitch. Screw *The Buena Vista Social Club*, it's time for the Ghosts to kick communist rebel ass and take names later. Dig through to the review section in this issue to see what we thought of the upgrade (page 104).

Nothing like the seething sound of the sea—before a bunch of Green Berets comes and shoots everything to hell, that is.

Think you can hold the [illegible] [illegible] these guys? [illegible] new game mode, Defend, which is the bullet-slinging version of King of the Hill. With smarter A.I., it won't be the cakewalk you think it'd be.

Can you see the 300,000 Nazis, 600 Panzer tanks and 29 batteries of artillery in this picture?

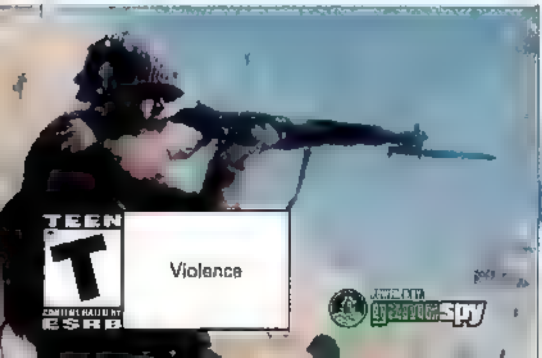
Neither could they.

1944: The Long Road to Berlin

Jun. 6: D-Day
Since dropping behind enemy lines 3,000 ft. above Normandy, France, your efforts have pushed the Nazis deep into the Ardennes forest.

Dec. 16: The Battle of the Bulge
During the worst blizzard in war history, Hitler's greatest gamble begins on a 90 mile loosely held Allied front.

Dec. 24: The Ardennes Forest
Hold the Allied line until a break in the weather allows American and British forces to begin bombing again.



Jan. 12, 1945: Nazi Berlin

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The opposite of reality TV **Edited by Ken Brown**

The Syrian shooter *Under Ash* lets players attack Israeli soldiers and settlers.

GAME CULTURE

Soldier of Intifada

Computer games are the latest weapons in the war of propaganda **By Rob Burns**

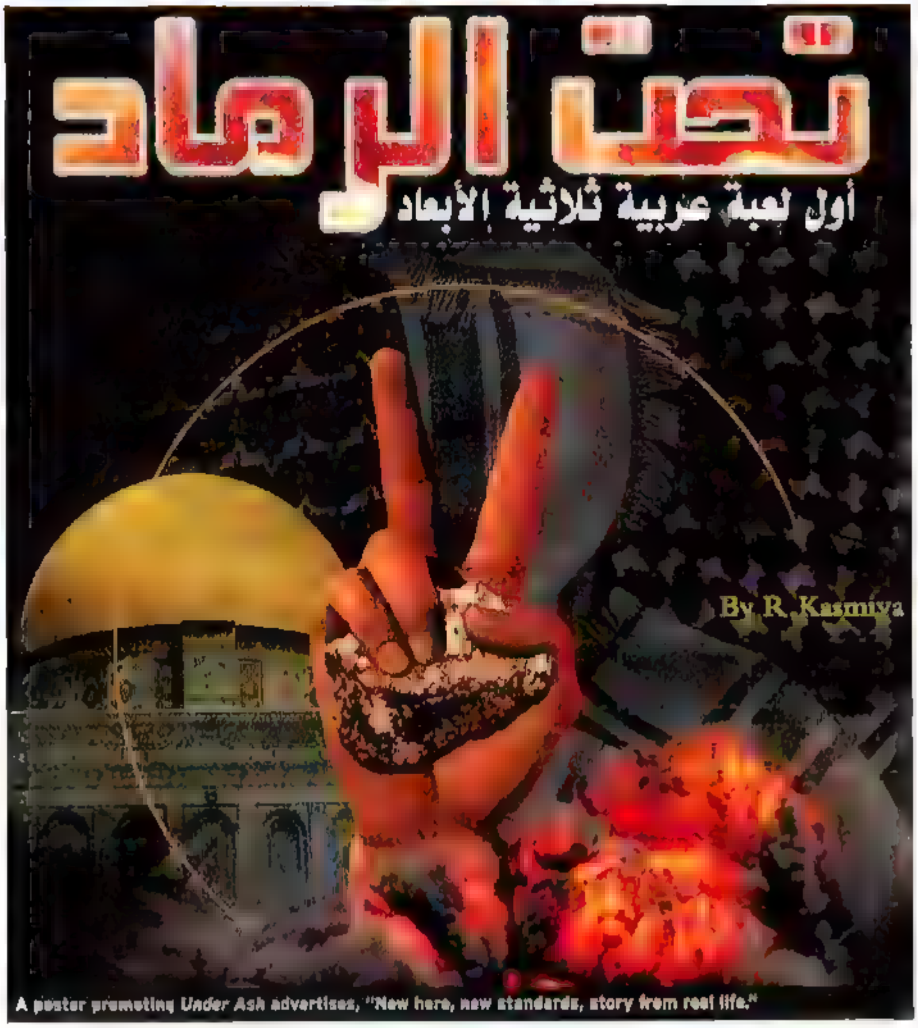
INSIDE

HANNIBAL Have an old friend for dinner. **Page 40**

BATTLEFIELD ADD-ON Add some Italian to your daily frag diet. **Page 43**

ROD FUNG Ex-SWAT 4 producer raises red flags. **Page 44**

POST MORTEM Bruce says we blew it on *Neverwinter*. **Page 46**



تحت الرماد
أول لعبة عربية ثلاثية الأبعاد
By R. Kasmiya

A poster promoting *Under Ash* advertises, "New here, new standards, story from real life."

> **"We consider *Under Ash* a new kind of history book. We are the mirror of real events."**
>
> **–Radwan Kasmiya, program manager**

It plays like a game, but its message of hatred is all too real. *Under Ash* is the Arab world's answer to such graphically violent 3D shooters as *Soldier of Fortune* and *Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear*. However, the protagonist isn't a commando or Special Forces soldier. He's Ahmad, a 19-year-old Palestinian refugee.

Created by Syrian publisher Dar el Fikr, *Under Ash* portrays the first Intifada, or Palestinian uprising against Israeli forces in the 1980s. As Ahmad, players take up arms (primarily stones, M16s, AK 47s, and hand grenades) and, after witnessing alleged atrocities against the Palestinian people, go forth on a one-man killing spree. Missions take players deep into enemy territory in such real-world locales as al Ramlah, an Israeli prison near Tel Aviv, and IDF bases in the Golan Heights. In one scenario that's characteristic of the game, Ahmad rampages against Israeli settlers on bulldozers who are building homes in the West Bank.

Dar el Fikr's program manager Radwan Kasmiya says the game was created as an alternative to American videogames, which he says unfairly portray Arabs as terrorists and villains. "Foreign games distort the facts and history," says Kasmiya. "These games succeeded in sneaking into our homes and into the minds of our children and youth. We consider *Under Ash* a new kind of history book. We are the mirror of real events."

In the battle-scarred trenches of this ancient land, just whose history is being narrated is a matter of perspective. Brian Marcus, an Internet researcher at the Jewish Anti Defamation League, says *Under Ash* hardly qualifies as a lesson in history. "This is the newest tool in a line of propaganda tools," he says. "It's targeting young people, and its intent is to objectify and glorify violence against Israeli settlers."

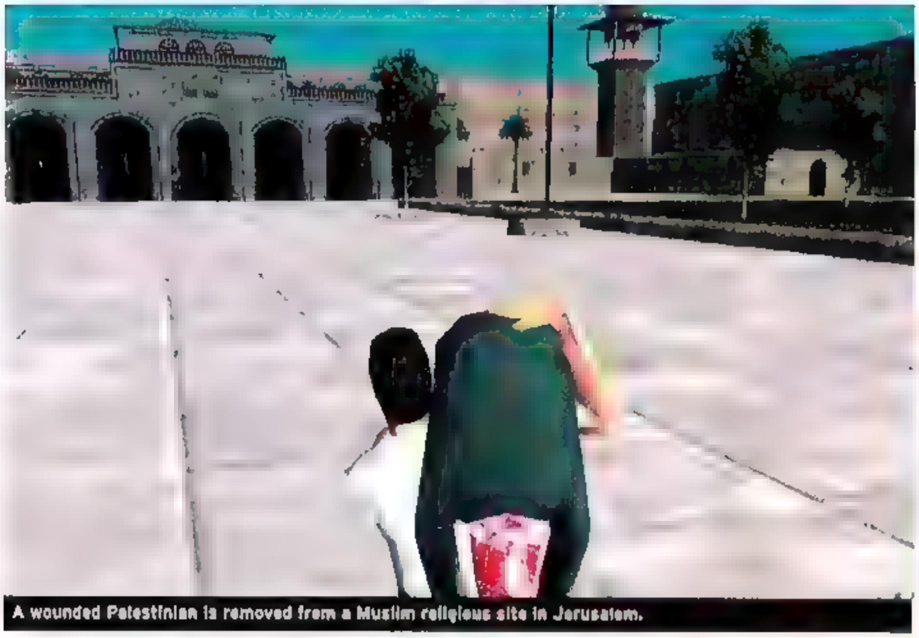
Marcus says the ADL is keeping a watchful eye on another Arabic videogame that has been circulating online. Called *Special Forces*, the game lets players participate in a re-creation of an actual Hizbollah attack that took place in 2000 on an Israeli base in Southern Lebanon. The site not only offers downloads of *Special Forces*, it details the tactics and intelligence (e.g., maps) used to make the attack a success. "This is a scary trend," says Marcus. "What better way exists to attract fresh meat than through the latest crop of explicit video wargames?"

Of course, you'd only find this kind of thing in the Middle East, right? Not so fast, says Kasmiya, who points an accusing finger at U.S. Army programmers, who recently released *America's Army* (see page 106 for the *CGW* review). The game, which cost taxpayers an estimated $7 million to produce, is a virtual boot camp that takes players through various Army training missions—and ultimately into battle against terrorists. This is no arcade shooting gallery; gamers learn how to fire sniper rifles and kill with extreme prejudice.

The U.S. Army PR machine insists the game is not a recruitment or propaganda tool, but some dismiss this claim as disingenuous at best. After all, Army recruiting offices lure visitors with free CDs containing the *America's Army* game. According to Linda Robertson, a professor at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York and an expert in the history of propaganda, the Army's intent is transparent. "The videogame is being used to desensitize males to acts of violence in the name of some higher good," she says. "This is the United States military's obvious point." Obvious, that is, to everyone but 14 year-olds.

The strategy may be working. During its first 50 days in release, more than 600,000 copies of *America's Army* were downloaded by PC users.

In the Middle East, *Under Ash* is arguably even more popular. It has been


A wounded Palestinian is removed from a Muslim religious site in Jerusalem.

ARABIC MEDIA ON UNDER ASH

"*Under Ash* is a chance to strike back at those games which always use Arabs and Moslems as the natural enemy." –itp.com

"The first step to achieve balance in our information war against Israel." –Teshreen Newspaper

"Seems promising. We are not going to compare it with anything; it is a unique jewel in a world of destructive foolish games, flying high away over profits and sheep entertaining." –Games4arabs.com

critically hailed by the Arabic press, and has been so well received by Arab teens that work has already begun on *Under Ash 2: Under Siege*. The story will chronicle the lives of a family living in Hebron during the second Intifada, from 2000 to 2002. Kasmiya says the game's ending will be "realistic"; in other words, it will not conclude with a giant, rocket-launching Zionist boss or a final victory for the Palestinian people. "The player is not a superhero that can solve all our problems by himself," he says.

In spite of its sobering message, Essam Al-Zamel, a Saudi teen who runs several websites for Arab gamers, says he's looking forward to the sequel. "It's not winning that's thrilling about *Under Ash* for most Muslims," he explains. "It's having a role in the fight for the liberty of our land."

"That may be the case for some Muslims," says Marcus. "But right now, we can only hope that someday, a game that advocates peace can prove as exhilarating to gamers."

NEWS FEED

Tarantino to help create *Kill Bill* game

■ Vivendi Universal has signed a deal with Quentin Tarantino to develop a game based on Tarantino's action film *Kill Bill*. The movie, starring Uma Thurman and Lucy Liu, is supposed to be packed with martial arts action, so it seems likely that the game will be laden with beat-downs as well, although VU offered no details yet. The game will be developed under VU's Black Label Games, which also developed *The Thing* and *The Lord of the Rings* (reviewed on page 120). VU says Tarantino will be involved as a creative consultant and will provide some film footage for the game. The movie is scheduled to release in October 2003, but the game won't see the light of day until the following summer.

Serious Sam Strikes Again

■ IGN.com reports that a true sequel to *Serious Sam* is set for Xbox and PC release sometime next year. Although Gathering of Developers released a follow-up entitled *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter*, developer Croteam says that game featured content left-over from the first game. The new game, *Serious Sam 2*, is reportedly well into development and scheduled to ship in late 2003.

GAME MATH

Formulas they never taught in game school by Erik Wolpaw

Typing of the Dead + Little Computer People = Resident Evil = **THE SIMS ONLINE**

Tomb Raider II + Tomb Raider I − Tomb Raider II = **TOMB RAIDER III**

(Wolfenstein 3D + Doom + Quake) / Daikatana = **HYPERSPACE DELIVERY BOY**

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GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
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NBA Live 2003	Electronic Arts	11/15/02
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	11/16/02
Hegemonia: Legions of Iron	DreamCatcher	11/16/02
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind: Tribunal	Bethesda Softworks	11/17/02
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	11/21/02
James Bond 007: Nightfire	Electronic Arts	11/21/02
The Sims Online	Electronic Arts	12/5/02
Bratz	Ubi Soft	12/5/02
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	12/10/02
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	Vivendi Universal	12/12/02
SimCity 4	Electronic Arts	1/16/03
Unreal II - The Awakening	Infogrames	1/21/03
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	2/5/03
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	2/6/03
Counterstrike: Condition Zero	Sierra	2/15/03
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	2/15/03
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	3/1/03
EVE Online: The Second Genesis	Simon & Schuster	3/4/03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory	id software	3/25/03

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HANDS ON

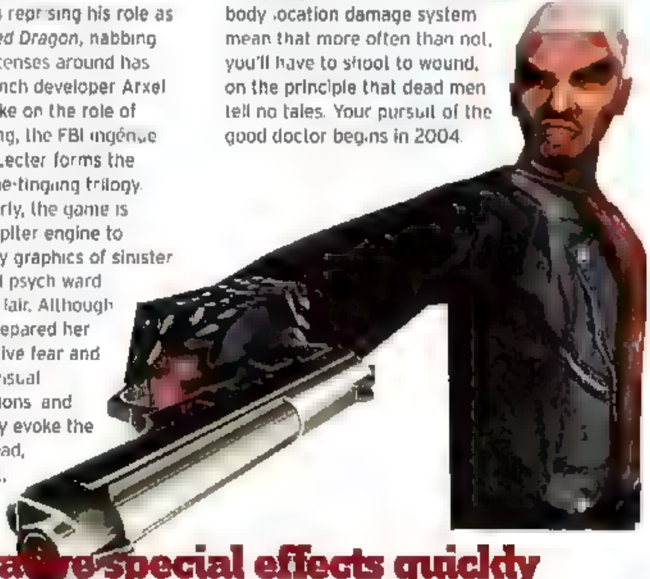
Hannibal the Cannibal

Have an old friend for dinner **By John Houlihan**

"A serving of fava beans with your main course, sir?" Hmm, probably a side order to avoid in *Hannibal*, the first person shooter starring everyone's favorite Chianti-imbibing serial killer.

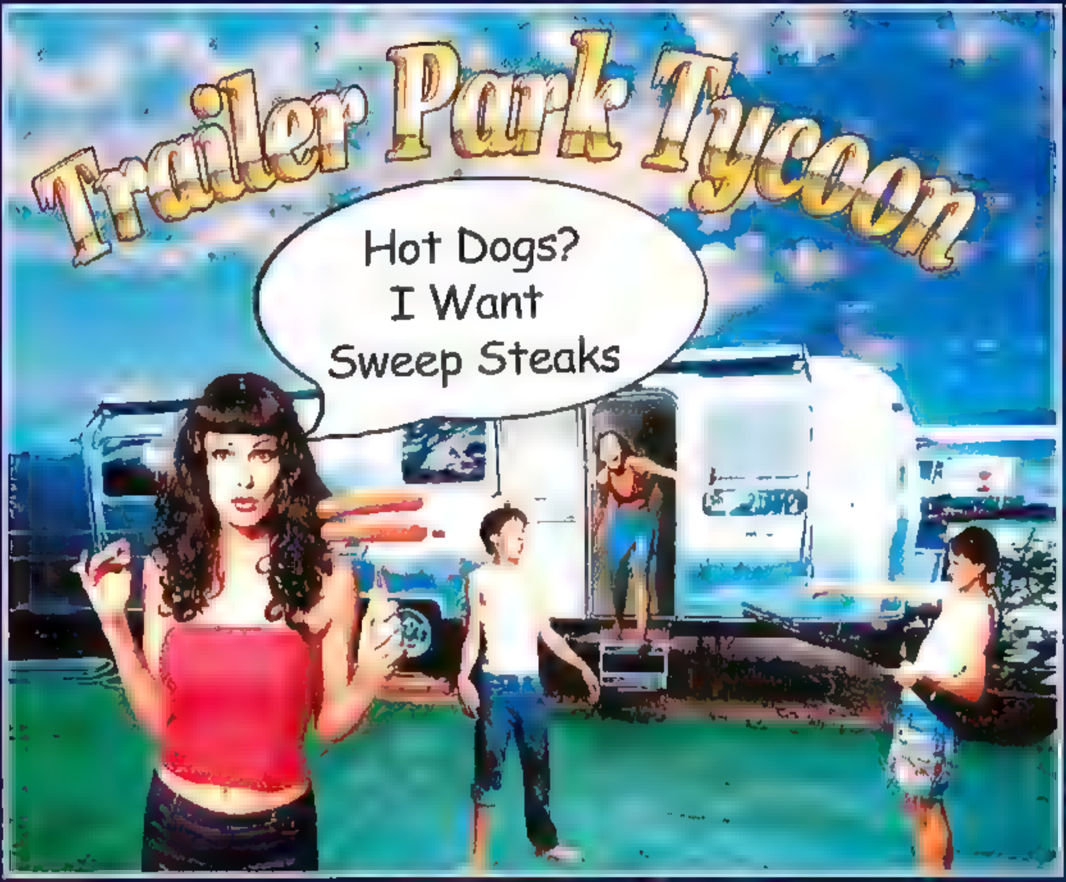
With Sir Anthony Hopkins reprising his role as the malevolent doctor in *Red Dragon*, nabbing one of the biggest movie licenses around has proved quite a coup for French developer Arxel Tribe. The game lets you take on the role of special agent Clarice Starling, the FBI ingénue whose love-hate duel with Lecter forms the core of Thomas Harris' spine-tingling trilogy.

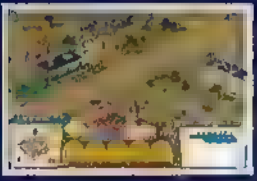
Although it's still quite early, the game is already using Monolith's Jupiter engine to excellent effect, with spooky graphics of sinister locations like an abandoned psych ward and Hannibal's glass prison lair. Although Clarice's FBI training has prepared her for the worst, some innovative fear and hallucinogenic effects like visual distortions, altered perceptions, and amplified heartbeats quickly evoke the feeling of suspense and dread, perfectly capturing the taut, chilling atmosphere of the books. The emphasis will be on careful investigation and evidence accumulation rather than all-out blasting action. While flashing your FBI shield will occasionally cow suspects, some intriguing A.I. and a comprehensive body location damage system mean that more often than not, you'll have to shoot to wound, on the principle that dead men tell no tales. Your pursuit of the good doctor begins in 2004.



Some innovative special effects quickly evoke the feeling of suspense and dread.

The Wacky Tycoon Game Set In Backwoods, USA


Trailer Park Tycoon
Hot Dogs? I Want Sweep Steaks



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Comic Mischief
Mild Violence
Use of Alcohol

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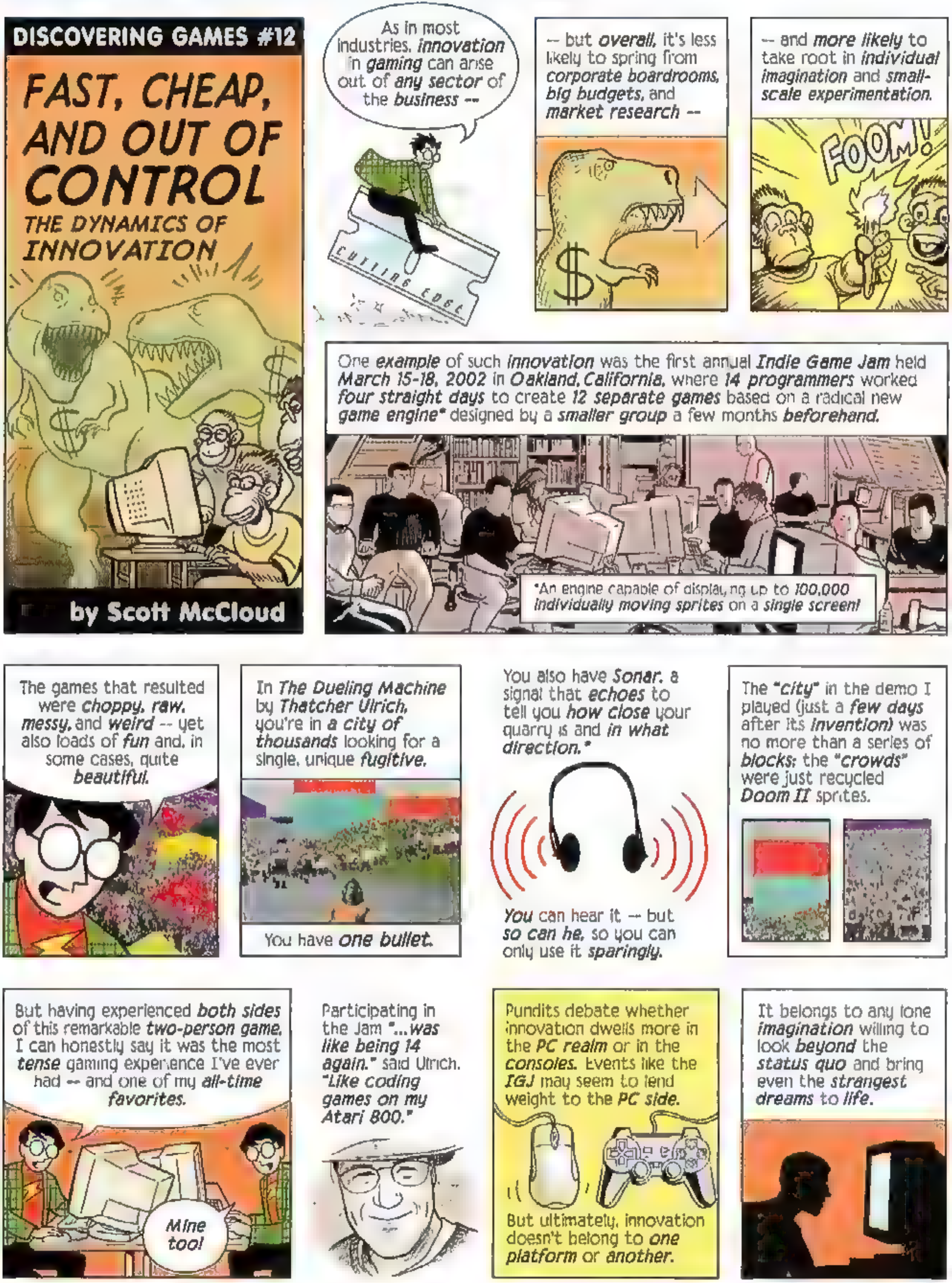

DISCOVERING GAMES #12
FAST, CHEAP, AND OUT OF CONTROL
THE DYNAMICS OF INNOVATION
by Scott McCloud
As in most industries, *innovation* in *gaming* can arise out of *any sector* of the *business* --
CUTTING EDGE
-- but *overall*, it's less likely to spring from *corporate boardrooms, big budgets*, and *market research* --
-- and *more likely* to take root in *individual imagination* and *small-scale experimentation.*
FOOM!
One *example* of such *innovation* was the first annual *Indie Game Jam* held *March 15-18, 2002* in *Oakland, California*, where *14 programmers* worked *four straight days* to create *12 separate games* based on a radical new *game engine** designed by a *smaller group* a few months *beforehand.*
*An engine capable of displaying up to *100,000 individually moving sprites* on a *single screen!*
The games that resulted were *choppy, raw, messy*, and *weird* -- yet also loads of *fun* and, in some cases, quite *beautiful.*
In *The Dueling Machine* by *Thatcher Ulrich*, you're in *a city of thousands* looking for a single, unique *fugitive.*
You have *one bullet.*
You also have *Sonar*, a signal that *echoes* to tell you *how close* your quarry is and *in what direction.**
You can hear it -- but *so can he*, so you can only use it *sparingly.*
The *"city"* in the demo I played (just a *few days* after its *invention*) was no more than a series of *blocks*; the *"crowds"* were just recycled *Doom II* sprites.
But having experienced *both sides* of this remarkable *two-person game*, I can honestly say it was the most *tense* gaming experience I've ever had -- and one of my *all-time favorites.*
Mine too!
Participating in the Jam *"...was like being 14 again,"* said Ulrich. *"Like coding games on my Atari 800."*
Pundits debate whether innovation dwells more in the *PC realm* or in the *consoles*. Events like the *IGJ* may seem to lend weight to the *PC side.*
But ultimately, innovation doesn't belong to *one platform* or *another.*
It belongs to any lone *imagination* willing to look *beyond* the *status quo* and bring even the *strangest dreams* to *life.*

*The sonar idea was suggested by fellow Jammer Marc LeBlanc.

Thanks to Chris Hecker and Thatcher Ulrich. For additional info, visit indiegamejam.com.

RECON

The Battlefield Just Got Bigger

The Road to Rome is paved with bullets **By Darren Gladstone**

When you get tired of capping Germans in *Battlefield 1942*, don't worry. You've still got at least one more axis power to beat down: Italy. That's right, with *The Road to Rome* expansion pack someone's finally going to pay for making *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

Based on the lesser-known Italian campaigns in World War II, six new maps recreate Operation Husky (Sicily), as well as the battles for Anzio and Monte Cassino. The maps will serve up more of that 64-player mayhem *Battlefield* is known for. Plus, two new forces join the fight: the Italians (duh!) and the French Legionnaires. Arm them with an arsenal of new weapons such as the Italian Breda assault rifle, British Sten SMG, and rifle bayonet. With new terrain to cover, you've got eight new vehicles to hop into, including new tanks (Italian, German, and British), antitank guns, and some more air support from the German BF-110 and British Mosquito fighter-bombers.

While this expansion might not be the bomb, it looks like it'll help win the war against lame-ass expansion packs. Check it out when it hits shelves this winter.

EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

More Freeware–Woot!

Many people have fond memories of LucasArts adventure games, but in case you hadn't noticed, the company hasn't exactly been churning them out lately. Enter the Adventure Game Authoring System (AGAST), which lets users create their own LucasArts-style adventure games—for free. We looked at a game this month that goes far beyond what most people have been able to do with the system, and we tested the latest effort from longtime freeware creator Ville Mönkkönen.

Ozzie and the Quantum Playwright

Dean Sullivan and Karl Coosie

ozzie.adventuredevelopers.com

We've looked before at adventure games created with AGAST, but never found any with production values like those in *Ozzie and the Quantum Playwright*. While the game itself is quite short and easy, the graphics have a quality rarely seen outside a retail release. The acoustic guitar soundtrack is also good, and although the game isn't as funny as its authors probably hoped, it does have its moments. It's worth the large download for adventure fans and those who want to see what AGAST is capable of in the right hands.

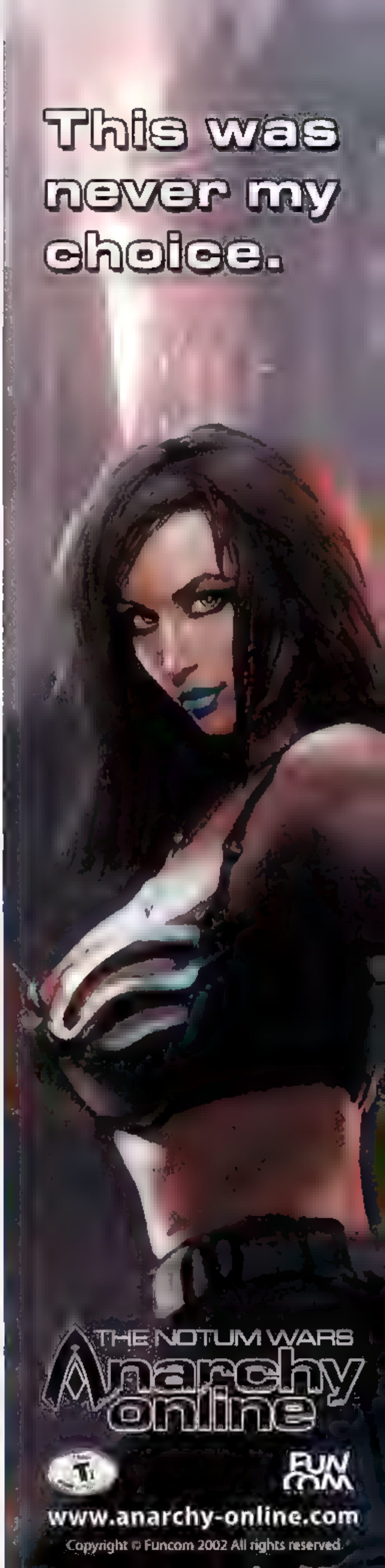
Magebane 2: Trinity

Ville Mönkkönen

koti.mbnet.fi/~bikez

From the same programmer that brought us *Bikez II* and *Wazzal* (sort of like *Sid Meier's Pirates* in deep space) comes *Magebane 2: Trinity*. This surprisingly deep action role-playing game uses top-down 3D graphics to excellent effect, and it's packed with spell effects and loads of blood. Players control three monks who each specialize in a variety of combat and magic abilities, and each character can be upgraded using a simple interface after each battle.

Success requires a great deal of planning, both before and during the numerous battles. Be sure to read the user manual and strategy guide before getting started.



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THE CGW INTERVIEW

Rod Fung

Surprising revelations about *SWAT 4* from the game's former executive producer

[illegible]

> "[Sierra] decided to [switch to] the *Unreal* engine and delay the game. I believe it [illegible] poor decision."

Rod Fung was Mr. *SWAT*. Until his recent departure to join Microsoft, Fung was with Sierra Online for 12 years, during which time he helped originate the *SWAT* franchise and produced the groundbreaking *SWAT 3*. Fung left Sierra in September 2002 to join Microsoft's Xbox division, where he will head up a new content support group. After Fung's departure, Sierra announced that *SWAT: Urban Justice* (*SWAT 4*) would be delayed for an indefinite period of time. With Sierra not offering any explanation, we decided to ask Fung about the game's status.

CGW: *SWAT 4* represents a departure from the previous game's focus on authentic weapons and tactics. Whose idea was it to depart from the previous focus? Did you agree with it?

ROD FUNG: It was our management's idea to create a game that appealed to a larger audience, and we were given sales forecasts that we needed to reach to justify our development costs. It's kind of a double-edged sword, as the *SWAT* game concept was never intended to be a mass consumer title along the lines of *Half-Life*, but yet we were tasked with making a *SWAT* game that competed on that level.

CGW: Have you taken any flack from *SWAT* fans over how the game is shaping up?

RF: Sure. The majority of the fan base disapproved of our moving away from realistic tactics and weapons. I tend to agree with them, as I want to play the same game that they want to play.

CGW: Why did you leave the project?

RF: I left Sierra because I felt that my time had come to move on with my career, and I was offered a better opportunity at a much more stable company. It was really that simple.

CGW: When is the game shipping? Why was it delayed?

RF: I don't know when the game will be available. I believe that they decided to go with the *Unreal* engine and delay the game for an undisclosed amount of time. I personally believe it was a very poor decision, as the *SWAT 4* engine supported the game well and would have allowed it to be released this Christmas. I still don't know why they decided to go with the *Unreal* engine—probably has something to do with multiplayer support. Current upper management feels that licensing and using the *Unreal* engine for *SWAT 4* will make it competitive with state-of-the-art first-person shooters.

REALITY CHECK

Reality Check compares the ratings of the major gaming press with GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews for a particular title.

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot.com	IGN.com	Gamespy	GameRankings.com
Battlefield 1942	A	A	A	A-	A	A	A-
Divine Divinity	B-	B+	B+	A-	*	B+	B+
Grand Prix 4	A	B-	B-	B+	B+	A-	B+
Mafia	B-	A	B+	A	A	A	A-
Medieval: Total War	A+	B+	B+	A-	A-	A-	A+
The Thing	C	B-	C	B	B+	C+	B

MOOLAH

Mad Simoleans

The Sims revenue rivals the top-grossing movies of all time **By Ken Brown**

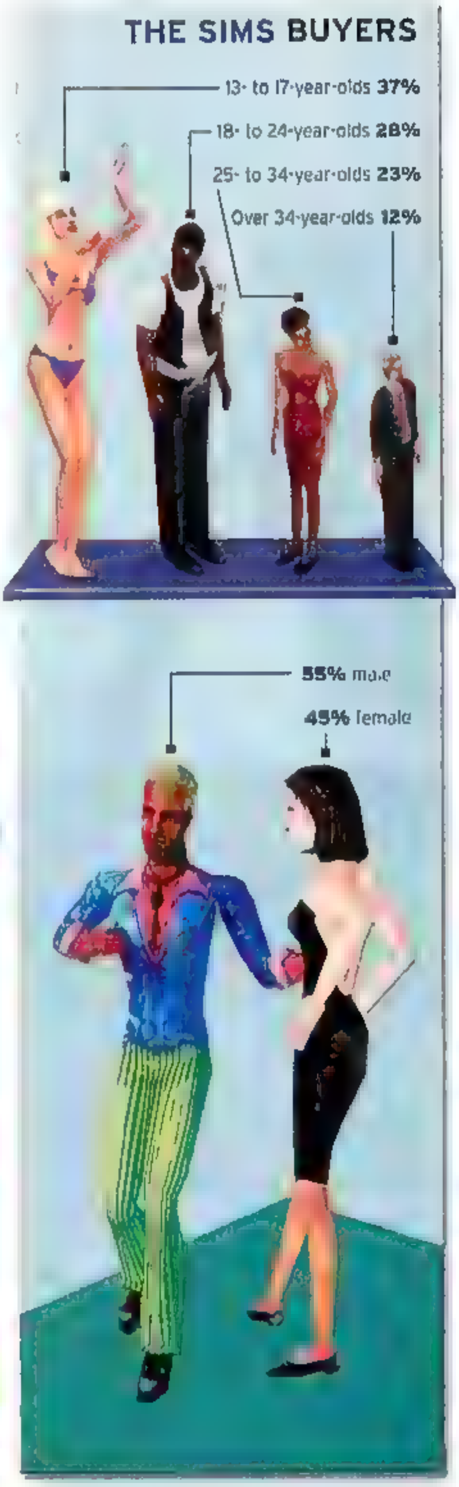
Love them or hate them, the Sims are propagating faster than e-mail spam hawking hot teens with big pom-poms. As of August, more than 7 million copies of *The Sims* have sold in the U.S., making it the top-selling PC game of all time. Combined with all the expansions (*Livin' Large*, *House Party*, *Hot Date*, *Vacation*, and *Unleashed*), Electronic Arts has sold an astounding 17 million units. No wonder they love the game's creator, Will Wright, who, together with his team at Maxis, has produced one of the top grossing franchises in gaming history.

Those kinds of numbers tend to chum the water for big advertisers. Intel and McDonald's both bit hard, signing multimillion dollar deals to put hamburgers, fries, and Intel-branded computers into *The Sims Online*.

The games have also grabbed plenty of media attention. In its recent Power List of entertainers for 2002, *Entertainment Weekly* ranked Wright No. 35 overall, between Dave Matthews and Tom Clancy, ahead of headliners like Cameron Diaz, Vin Diesel, and Bono.

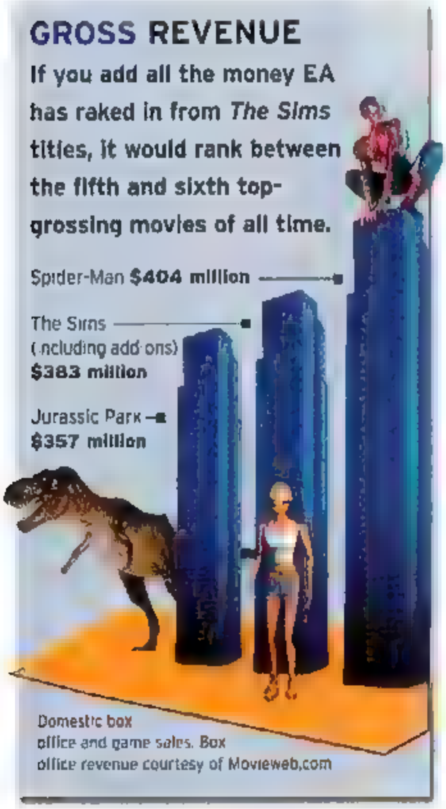
Here are a few more stats for Sims fans who want to know how they stack up versus the Goths.

THE SIMS BUYERS

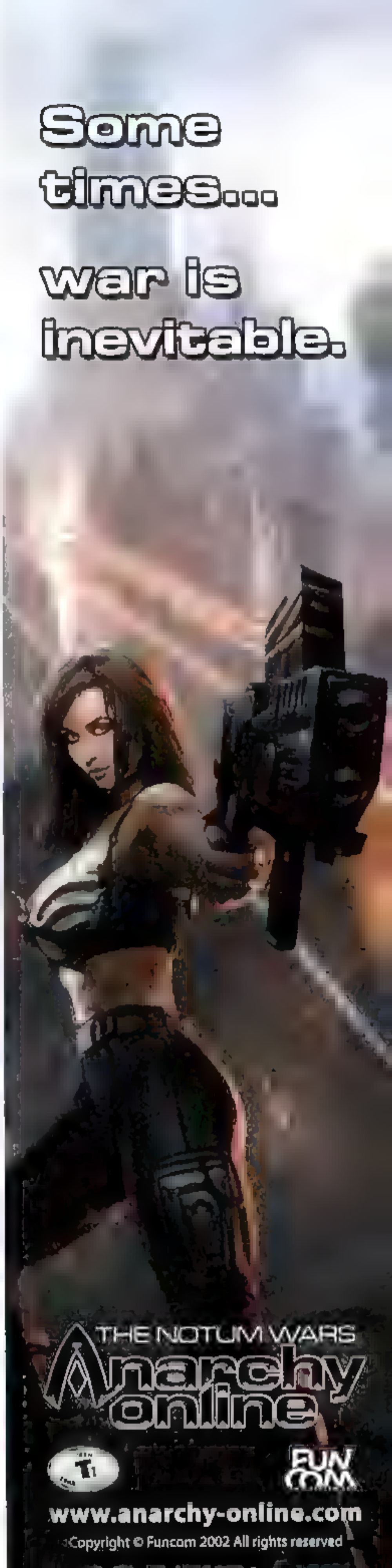


GROSS REVENUE

If you add all the money EA has raked in from *The Sims* titles, it would rank between the fifth and sixth top-grossing movies of all time.



Domestic box office and game sales. Box office revenue courtesy of Movieweb.com



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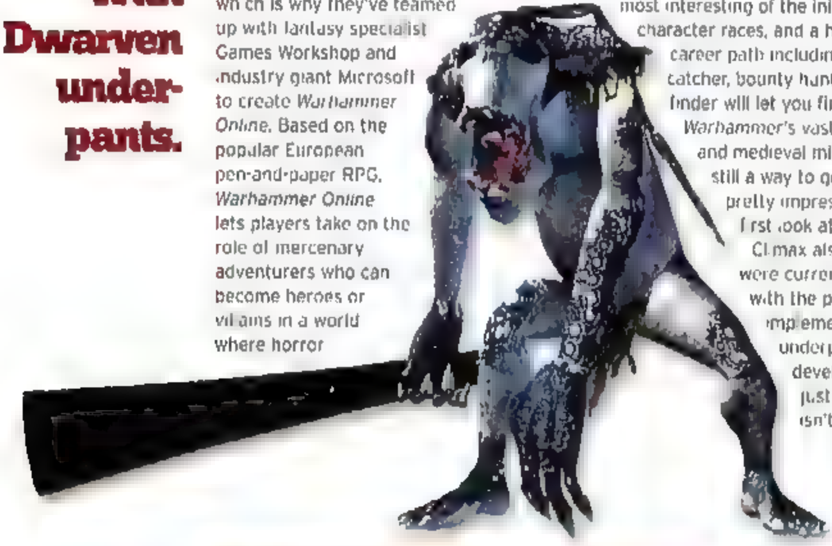
PREVIEW

Warhammer Online

U.K. developers race Blizzard to get Ogres online

By John Houlihan

Brute force of arms wrestle with Dwarven underpants.



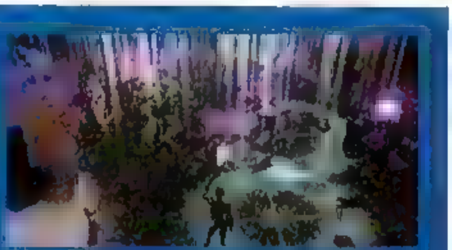
We already have *Star Wars Galaxies*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Matrix*, *World of WarCraft*, Marvel superheroes, and lord knows how many other massively multiplayer games coming online—can there be enough players interested in yet another online bash 'em up? Well, U.K. developers Climax seems to think so, which is why they've teamed up with fantasy specialist Games Workshop and industry giant Microsoft to create *Warhammer Online*. Based on the popular European pen-and-paper RPG, *Warhammer Online* lets players take on the role of mercenary adventurers who can become heroes or villains in a world where horror and menace lurk at every turn. Kind of like working for *CGW*.

With more than 20 years of offline development, *Warhammer* is already a mature and well-populated universe. It is set in an atmosphere roughly akin to medieval Germany, where brute force of arms, magic, and new black-powder technologies collide. Ogres are perhaps the most interesting of the initial playable character races, and a highly structured career path including roles like ratcatcher, bounty hunter and witch finder will let you find your place in *Warhammer's* vast urban cities and medieval milieu. There's still a way to go, but we were pretty impressed by our first look at the title, when Climax also revealed they were currently wrestling with the problem of implementing Dwarven underpants. Game development: It's just pure glamour isn't it?

PERSPECTIVE

POST-MORTEM

By Bruce Geryk



Neverwinter Nights

One of the reasons I really like writing for *Computer Gaming World* is that I know my columns will be read by geniuses. This fact was driven home in the November issue, in which a reader wrote that "This will go down as another *Black & White*," where "this" referred to *Neverwinter Nights*. The fact a genius and I both had the same idea strongly suggests that I am a genius as well, because I really think this magazine blew it with its review of *Neverwinter Nights*.

Some people tried to defend the single-player campaign as "good," which was pretty damning in itself, considering that this game was being touted as the best computer role-playing game ever. No worries: The real attraction was its expandability, meaning that college students and people with day jobs could magically create better adventures than the one Bioware spent years developing full time.

But the fundamental gameplay problems that make the solo game so crappy are bound to sink any user-created module, leaving the game with the single redeeming feature that you can get together with friends and substitute it for your weekly pen-and-paper dice fest. Except you actually have to get together online at the same time across multiple time zones.

CGW gave *Black & White* five stars, only to apologize later in the year-end awards issue. *Neverwinter* got four and a half stars, but unlike *Black & White*, *NN* has a whole genre full of fans to defend it for irrational reasons. So, don't count on justice being done at the end of the year. Just another of those things that geniuses have a hard time accepting.

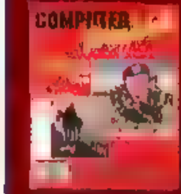
5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW

Five Years Ago, January 1998

'Twas a month of beginnings, both fortuitous and infamous. In the very first Greenspeak, Jeff rambled incoherently on a topic he'd revisit over the years: his outright lameness at playing *Age of Empires*. It was funny and adored, unlike the two-page ad touting what looked like a third-rate Rush cover band—Ion Storm. With no products to tout, this spread trumpeted the brilliance of the company's founders, most of whom would flee the sinking Ion ship before it unleashed its first wave of robotic frogs.

Ten Years Ago, January 1993

The full-page ad for the Japanese import *Cobra Mission* premised a game that would have you "reacting physically and emotionally" to its full-screen graphics. That these graphics were of R-rated anime porn makes this one of the absolute ickiest ads ever, even to Robert Coffey. And we recognized it as such, saying in our review in the same issue, "This game begs for a beating."



Fifteen Years Ago, January 1988

Long before every RPG worth its +2 Bastard Sword of Dire Fate included an annotatable minimap, companies like QuestBusters advertised in our pages. For just $15, the QuestBuster's Cartography Kit gave you 50 mapping sheets for graphic/text adventures (yes, for text adventures), 50 sheets for role-playing games, 20 clue sheets, 20 character sheets, and 20 town and castle sheets. Questbusters was even kind enough to throw in a manual in case the whole mapping concept eluded you.

THE NOTUM WARS
Anarchy online
"BEST MMOG OF THE YEAR" (2002)
PC GAMER
The future has not been set.
There is no honour in apathy.
IN STORES THIS THANKSGIVING
TEEN T
FUNCOM
www.anarchy-online.com
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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

Dark Age of Camelot Expansion: Shrouded Isles *(Vivendi Universal)* This expansion pack extends the story of the original game with new character classes, new races, and three new continents to explore - displayed in an all-new state-of-the-art graphics engine.

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *(LucasArts)* A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players' as well as established characters from the movies.

SimCity 4 *(EA Games)* Don't just build your city, breathe life into it. With god-like powers, sculpt mountains, gouge riverbeds, and seed forests to lay the groundwork for your creation. The impact of your touch will be immediate but not entirely predictable.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell *(UbiSoft)* Infiltrate terrorists' positions, acquire critical intelligence by any means necessary, execute with extreme prejudice, and exit without a trace! The world balance is in your hands, as cyber terrorism and international tensions are about to explode into WWIII.

Counterstrike: Condition Zero *(Sierra)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.

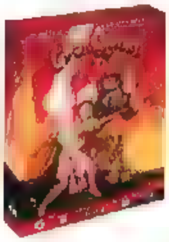
THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets *(Electronic Arts)* Be Harry Potter in a new adventure with more magic, friendship and danger. Learn new spells, undertake new quests, make new friends and challenge new adversaries to confront the powers at the heart of the Chamber of Secrets.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring *(Vivendi Universal)* Explore the massive environments of Middle Earth as one of the Fellowship. Solve puzzles and fight enemies like Orcs, Black Riders, and an evil Balrog in the quest to destroy the One Ring of Power.

The Sims Online *(EA Games)* Take your Sims to a multi-player online world where you get to be whoever you want to be. Build a network of friends from around the world to enhance your power, wealth, and social standing. In this open ended world, you choose your role, your attitude, and your destiny.

Age of Mythology *(Microsoft)* Transport yourself to a time when heroes did battle with monsters of legend and the gods intervened in the affairs of mortal men. Wage war using human armies and diplomacy, enhance military and economic performance through resource gathering and trade.



Everquest: The Planes of Power *(Sony Online Entertainment)* You will be introduced to an arching story line through the Planes of Power, home of the gods of Norrath. Hundreds of new items, quests, and encounters will keep even the most revered players challenged and enthralled.

All available now at the Computer & Video Games store at

amazon.com.

Get thousands of game titles at amazon.com/videogames

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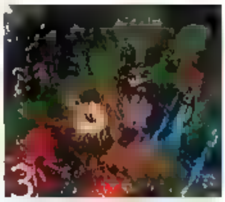
RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

The Sims unleash another best-seller

Tamagotchi play with their tamagotchi in *The Sims: Unleashed.*

There's no shortage of recruits for *Battlefield 1942.*


After four months, *WarCraft III* finally falls out of first.

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	--	**The Sims: Unleashed** (Electronic Arts, $29)	★★★★★
2	[illegible]	**Battlefield 1942** (Electronic Arts, $45)	★★★★½
3	1	**WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos** (Vivendi Universal, $52)	★★★★☆
4	[illegible]	**Unreal Tournament 2003** (Infogrames, $46)	★★★★☆
5	2	**The Sims: Vacation** (Electronic Arts, $28)	★★★★☆
6	[illegible]	**The Sims Deluxe** (Electronic Arts, $42)	NR
7	3	**The Sims** (Electronic Arts, $43)	★★★★★
8	[illegible]	**RollerCoaster Tycoon** (Infogrames, $17)	★★★★☆
9	--	**Mafia** (Gathering of Developers, $48)	★★★½☆
10	[illegible]	**Zoo Tycoon** (Microsoft, $25)	★★★½☆
11	8	**The Sims: Hot Date** (Electronic Arts, $29)	★★★★½
12	[illegible]	**Medieval: Total War** (Activision, $38)	★★★★★
13	7	**Medal of Honor: Allied Assault** (Electronic Arts, $46)	★★★★½
14	20	**Icewind Dale II** (Interplay, $45)	★★★★½
15	--	**SpongeBob SquarePants: Krabby Patty** (THQ, $20)	NR
16	[illegible]	**Madden NFL 2003** (Electronic Arts, $38)	★★★★★
17	19	**Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone** (Electronic Arts, $23)	★★★½☆
18	--	**Sim Theme Park World** (Electronic Arts, $17)	NR
19	6	**Backyard Baseball 2003** (Infogrames, $19)	NR
20	[illegible]	**Grand Theft Auto III** (Take 2 Interactive/Rockstar, $47)	★★★★★

September retail sales results by NPD Techworld

NOTABLE QUOTE

"Instead of blaming videogames, shouldn't the media be focused on understanding how someone [like the sniper] could have such little regard for human life?"

-Dave, on Geek.com message board

GREAT DEALS ON PC GAMES

Zoo Tycoon Marine Mania
(Microsoft)
Regular Price: ~~$29.99~~
Sale Price! $24.99

A fun expansion pack that works with the existing Zoo Tycoon game, enabling you to integrate more than 20 aquatic animals into your existing zoos
Features:
- Whales and sharks for your zoo!
- New attractions like the Dolphin Ride and Shark Tunnel
- Challenging gameplay!
- Includes Zoo Tycoon: Dinosaur Digs expansion pack

Zoo Tycoon
(Microsoft) *Regular Price:* ~~$29.99~~
Sale Price! $24.99

Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings
(Microsoft)
Regular Price: ~~$49.99~~
Sale Price! $39.99

The next-generation fantasy massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) where the world dynamically evolves around you.
Features:
- You and your fellow players must venture forth and shape the course of this ever-evolving world
- Join with your fellow players in huge allegiances to rebuild your cities and resources
- State of the art 3-D graphics, innovative combat and gameplay and a dynamic monthly update system

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets
(Electronic Arts)
Sale Price! $29.99

Be Harry Potter in a unique new PC adventure with more magic, friendship, and danger.
Features:
- Explore rich environments from the colorful Burrow to the dark reaches of the Forbidden Forest
- Master new spells including Expelliarmus, Diffendo, and Skurge.
- Overcome dangerous foes from Aragog to the Basilisk
- Take flight to play improved Quidditch

Check Out More Great Deals Online at

amazon.com.

PIPELINE

The dates they are a-changin' By Thierry Nguyen

Keep in mind that release dates are basically best guesses for most companies until the game gets closer to being finished. Generally, the farther along the game is, the more accurate its release date, but even then anything can happen. For up-to-the-minute dates, stop by GameGold.com.

Doom III: Id Software's stock answer to release date queries is always "When it is done." In fact, Id coined that term, and it most certainly applies here. But, if you dig around a little, you'll see some clues that Id expects it to be ready by May. For example, Carmack has repeatedly said that he doesn't want to be showing this game at E3 2003. And Todd Hollenshead mused that QuakeCon 2003 would be a "*Doom III* launch party." Heck, Amazon.com expects the game to be out in March! Anyhow, it seems likely that *Doom III* will be out within the first half of next year.

Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield: We were hoping to have our grubby little counter-terrorist hands on this game by now, but unfortunately, it's been pushed to February. But that's good news, actually. Chadi Lebbos, Producer, says, "We extended the development cycle to build in all the things we wanted. It's the worst when a developer looks at a game and thinks to himself, 'If only we had done that...' We knew *Rainbow Six* fans would rather wait to have a game that really blows them away, rather than have an inferior product that we rushed out the door." Looks like the wait will be worth it.

Imperium Galactica 3: The original *Imperium Galactica* debuted way back in 1997; apparently, it was very trendy to release big space-strategy games back then, real-time and turn-based. Of all of those franchises, *Imperium Galactica* was one of the few to survive and produce not only a sequel, but also an upcoming third installment. Number three was originally scheduled to ship this year, but German-based CDV pushed it back to early 2003. This way, they could add a whole new multiplayer mode, extending the shelf life while fulfilling your imperial or galactic needs.

1503 A.D.: The New World	EA	Q2 2003
American Conquest	CDV	Q2 2003
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	Q4 2002
Breed	CDV	Q2 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2003
Combat Mission 2: Barbarossa to Berlin	Big Time	Q4 2002
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	04/21/03
Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi	Q4 2002
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	11/06/02
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	Mythic	Q4 2002
Deadly Dozen: Pacific Theater	Infogrames	11/08/02
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	10/24/02
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q2 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q2 2003
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	Q4 2002
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q2 2003
Duke Nukem Forever	GOD Games	RIP
Escape from Alcatraz	HIP	Q1 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003
Freelancer	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Full Throttle 2	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Galactic Civilizations	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Ghost Master	Empire	Q1 2003
Gothic II	JoWood	Q4 2002
Hannibal	Arxel Tribe	Q2 2004
Halo	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Heaven and Hell	CDV	Q2 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	Q2 2003
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	10/02/02
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
IGI2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	11/20/02
Imperium Galactica III	CDV	Q2 2003
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q1 2003
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	12/20/02
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Unknown
Master of Orion III	Microprose	11/27/02
Max Payne II	GOD Games	Unknown
Metal Gear Solid 2	Konami	Q1 2003
Morrowind: Tribunal	Bethesda	Q4 2002
The Movies	Lionhead	Unknown
NBA Live	EA Sports	Q4 2002
Neocron	CDV	11/15/02
O.R.B	Strategy First	11/19/02
PlanetSide	Sony	Q1 2003
Platoon	Strategy First	11/15/02
Praetorians	Eidos	Q1 2003
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Project Nomads	CDV	11/06/02
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	02/04/03
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2003
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Robin Hood: Legend of Sherwood	Strategy First	Q4 2002
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Schlonghold	Satan's Fist	Q5 2003
Sea Dogs II	Bethesda	Q4 2002
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
SimCity 4	EA	Q1 2002
The Sims Online	EA	11/21/02
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	11/27/02
Star Trek: Starfleet Command III	Activision	11/13/02
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual	Q1 2003
Star Wars: Galaxies	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q1 2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Q1 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
Thief III	Eidos	Q2 2003
Tiger Woods PGA 2003	EA Sports	11/06/02
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	Q1 2003
Tron 2.0	Monolith	Q2 2003
Tropico 2	GOD Games	Q1 2003
Unreal II	Infogrames	11/20/02
Viet Cong	Take2	Q4 2002
Vultures	CDV	Q4 2003
Warlords IV	SSG	12/11/02
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q4 2002
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania	Microsoft	10/18/02

🟩 NEW ▨ UPDATE

Access Granted

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THE RIGHT TO SPY, STEAL, DESTROY AND ASSASSINATE,

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IF CAPTURED, MY GOVERNMENT WILL DISAVOW

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

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PC
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ROM

XBOX

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NVIDIA

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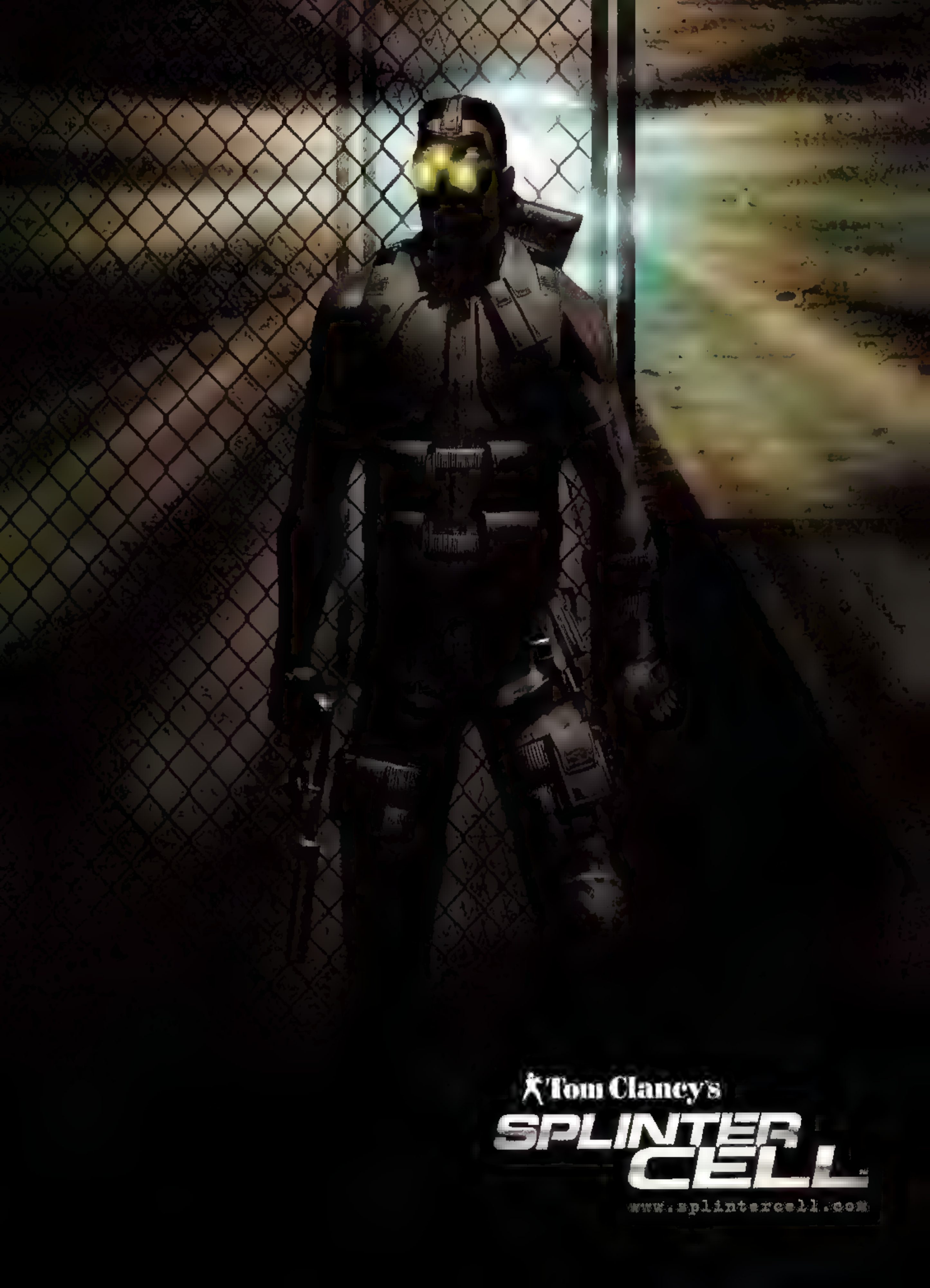
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WE WILL NOT FAIL EACH OTHER.
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

PlayStation.2

XBOX LIVE

XBOX

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• Nominee – Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences:
Best Sound Design
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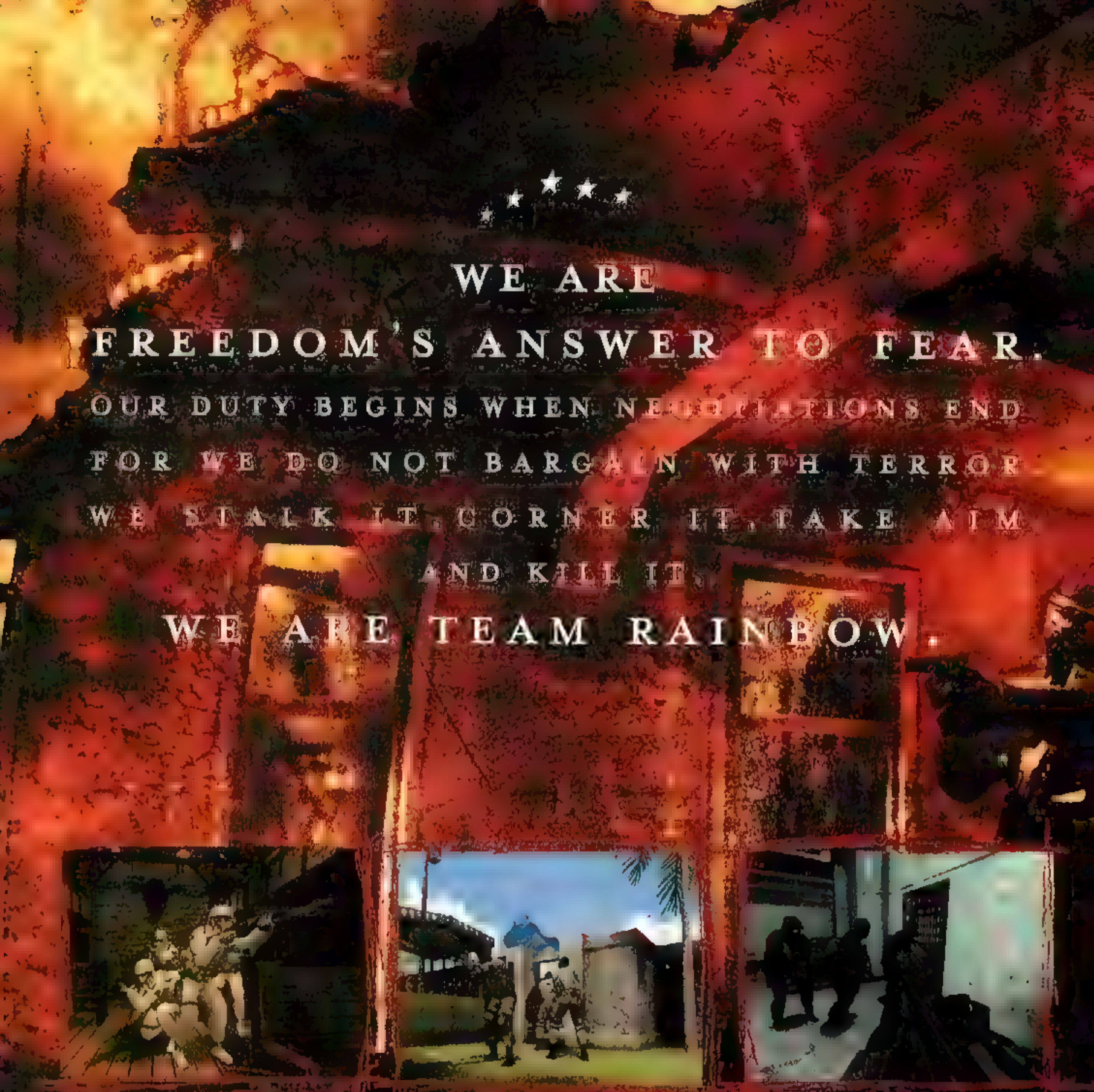
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
WE ARE
FREEDOM'S ANSWER TO FEAR.
OUR DUTY BEGINS WHEN NEGOTIATIONS END.
FOR WE DO NOT BARGAIN WITH TERROR.
WE STALK IT. CORNER IT. TAKE AIM.
AND KILL IT.
WE ARE TEAM RAINBOW.

SQUAD-BASED COUNTER-TERROR

The father of all tactical shooters returns, in an all-new game locked and loaded to change the face of action gaming... AGAIN. Advance to a new level of gaming realism with new high-tech gear to hunt the Tangos and 57 weapons to take them down. Experience unmatched graphical realism and high velocity multiplayer action powered by next generation Unreal™ technology. We wrote the book on tactical squad-based combat. Now we're rewriting it. Study up.

MATURE M ESRB Blood Violence

Ubi Soft Entertainment www.ubi.com

Red Storm Entertainment

PC CD ROM

Play it on ubi.com

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Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX 3™
RAVEN SHIELD
www.raven-shield.com

These big, red floating numbers are indicative of the game's emphasis on instant feedback—just in case you didn't know you were getting your ass kicked.

Asheron's Call 2 may have the requisite tree city, but you can't fall off the ledges like I did a million times when starting out in EverQuest. In AC2, you've got to jump off cliffs and such on purpose.

Fighting wraiths in [illegible]

ASHERON'S

MMORPG seeks loving GMR for casual fun, long-term relationship,

CALL 2

$15 a month **By Robert Coffey**

Easily the most painless and enjoyable early MMORPG game experience I've had.

In real life, a warm, heartfelt hug is a fine, fine thing. But is it such a great thing in a computer game? We'll find out (allegedly), later this year when the new iteration of Microsoft's massively multiplayer game, the cunningly titled *Asheron's Call 2*, hits store shelves and starts gobbling bandwidth.

A kinder, gentler version

Somewhat lost in the wake of the juggernaut that is, was, and ever shall be *EverQuest*, *Asheron's Call* has plugged along nicely, garnering an avid and dedicated fan base, if not a huge amount of attention. *AC2* hopes to change all that by beating most of the next round of MMORPGs out the door and creating a newbie-friendly environment that doesn't bend first-timers' brains five minutes into the game, as they try to figure out how to make a Sense Heading macro before they go on their 20th corpse run. *AC2* just gives you a friggin' compass and map right off the bat. That's one gold star right there, but *AC2* is shooting for the whole constellation.

Frankly, I couldn't be happier. Generally, the time I spend playing closed betas of these types of games is an exercise in frustration as I wrestle with the cloaked Mensa entrance exam that passes for gameplay, interface, and character development. Not so with *AC2*. Character creation was a snap, focusing solely on the general look of your avatar and not immediately sinking you in a bog of incomprehensible stats. Yeah, the limited number of options might be a little disappointing, but I was up and into the game within three minutes of connecting to Turbine's servers.

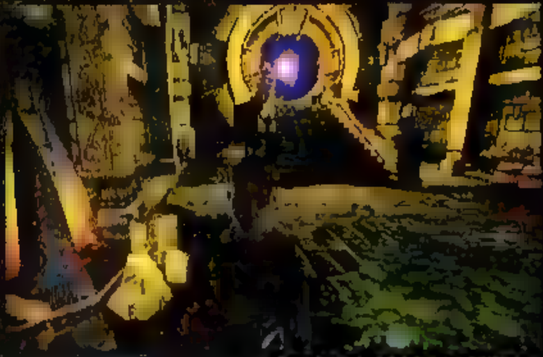
Getting off on the right foot

Once you're in the game world, considerately staggered learning stones fill you in on the basics of gameplay and bump you up a level within 15 minutes. The skill advancement and character development systems are just as friendly. At least, early on they are. Any character can do pretty much anything without constraint. You can shoot bows and cast spells in a full suit of armor without being straitjacketed by class restrictions. Instead, you pick your skills, using level advancements to purchase new abilities and using a completely separate pool of experience points to augment those acquired skills. It's a great system. You really can't screw up early in the game by picking "wrong" skills, and even if you do, you can unlearn them and work along a different branch of the skill tree. (Experience you spend on unlearned skills is not recouped, however.)

Once you leave the training grounds, you'll receive simple quests that introduce you to the game world and the questing system in short order. No more than two hours into the game I had gained a couple levels, gotten some decent loot, and found myself teleported to a small town where player craftsmen were cooperatively using a forge to make even better items for adventurers like me. It was easily the most painless and enjoyable early MMORPG game experience I've had—much better than the clueless and lost bat-bashing and loot-losing early hours of *EverQuest*.

I'm just hoping that the later stages of the game can be as rewarding. My time in the beta revealed a huge and visually rich world, but with many of the game's vaults broken, it was hard to tell if the bigger quests would deliver enough of a payoff. Considering the epic nature of the quests in the original *Asheron's Call*, I'll give Turbine the benefit of the doubt and assume that it isn't going to neuter one of its product's strongest features in order to appease the most casual gamers. Odds are, that segment of the audience won't even get that deep into the game.

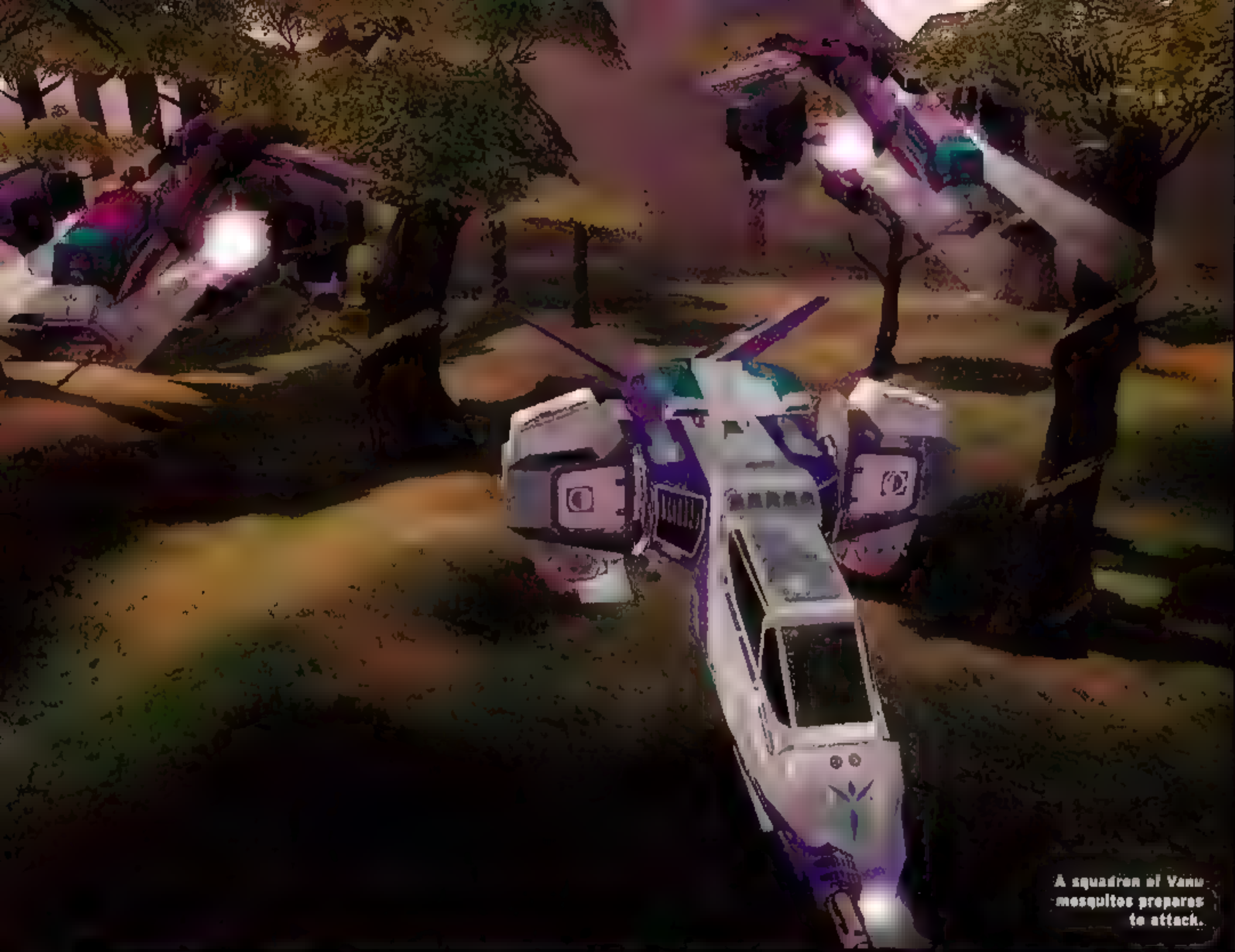
The big concern? Microsoft and Turbine swear up and down this game will be out right about the time you're reading this. Will it be ready, will the broader game world have enough to do by then? And will the game be stable? Hopefully, yes—but it's going to be tight. If they pull it off, this is a game that should appeal to the hardcore and more casual gamer alike.



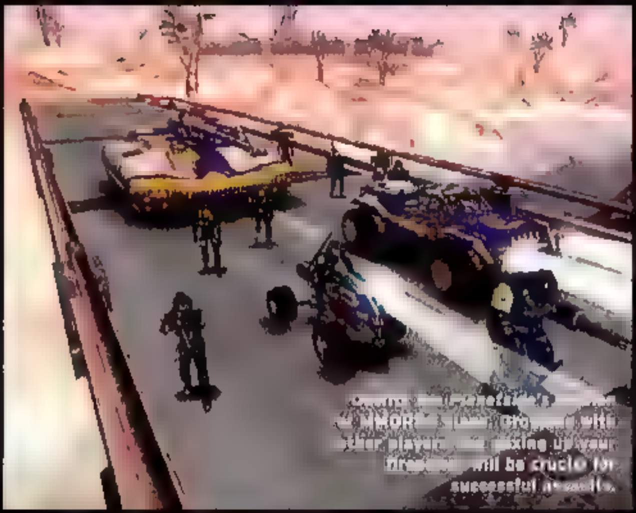
The high-reward vault quests are being rejiggered to prevent players from camping.

GAME STATS

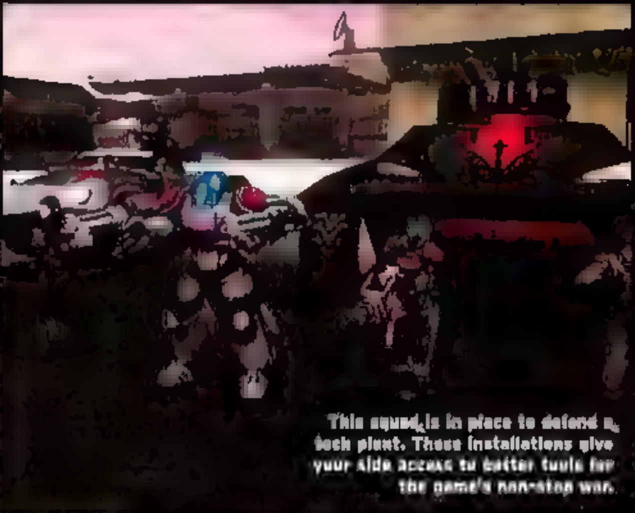
PUBLISHER: Microsoft Game Studios
DEVELOPER: Turbine Entertainment
GENRE: MMORPG
URL: www.asheronscall2.com
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2002



A squadron of Vanu mesquitos prepares to attack.



[illegible] an MMORPG. [illegible] Grouping with other players and mixing up your firepower will be crucial for successful assaults.



This squad is in place to defend a tech plant. These installations give your side access to better tools for the game's non-stop war.

PLANETSIDE

The first massively multiplayer shooter is the first pay-to-play shooter–

After a year's hiatus, we returned to Sony Online Entertainment to see how *PlanetSide*'s development was faring. Our biggest question—right next to "Is Sony really making this game?"—was, "Why are people going to pay to play a shooter online?" And why this shooter?

"*PlanetSide* has everything that the other FPS games have and more," producer Dave Georgeson was quick to point out. "What *PlanetSide* has that the others don't is gameplay. Gameplay doesn't equal the number of weapons or how many varieties of Capture the Flag or Deathmatch you have. Gameplay occurs when you give players a coherent universe with incredibly flexible rules, and then let them loose in that world to do almost anything. That's what *PlanetSide* delivers in spades."

Watching hordes of enemies falling from dropships hovering in the sky was both thrilling and ominous.

Unlike other FPS games, *PlanetSide* plays in real-time across 10 continents that are literally 30 to 40 times the size of the biggest FPS maps out there. Players ally with a strike team formed from one of three empires, each with its own distinct weapons, vehicles, and abilities—all of the teams also have a shared pool of items and abilities. The big difference over other FPS games like *UT2003* and *Battlefield 1942* lies in the game's continual conflict, which rages 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Players can check the current status of their outfits (clans), either in-game or through a Web-based feature, which will also allow for real-time communication.

The game engine is built to handle absolutely massive battles (think in the hundreds), and sure enough, as soon as we jumped on a PC and started shooting, we were clashing with more than 75 players from all over the United States, who were divided into two teams. We slugged it out in a couple of different maps, while utilizing myriad weaponry, armored vehicles, and flying craft. Except for the occasional beta code hiccup, the game played silky smooth across the Net. Pretty? You betcha! Exciting? Yes again! Watching hordes of enemies falling from dropships hovering in the sky was both thrilling and ominous.

PlanetSide is a persistent world. Actions have consequences, and strategies are long term. The game is about territory acquisition and global conquest. Players take bases, lock continents, try to invade areas controlled by the enemy, acquire air and vehicle superiority, call in reinforcements, and work within an unprecedented and very cool command structure. And this is where *PlanetSide* will sink or swim. No one side will ever achieve total victory, so the reward has to come in smaller, but still significant packages: seizing bases, holding bases, extending the front line, improving your character's in-game abilities, and achieving rank. If these activities fail to hold players' interest, Sony will fail to get players' $15 a month.

Part of the game's allure is its community, in which friends and foes are long term. You can quickly gain a reputation among your peers, and even become a star. Part of that star power grows from the game's innovative command structure. Players may advance along two separate pathways: battle rank, where battlefield achievements equate to advanced skills, weapons, and equipment; and command rank, where players, based on common leadership skills, become the online leaders of their factions. *PlanetSide*'s creative director and veteran lead, Kevin McCann, explains, "What this basically means is that in order for a player to advance in command rank, the player must attempt to be a good leader. If the squad leader consistently leads successful base captures, then soldiers will be eager to follow the player, thus allowing him or her to gain more command points and gain command ranking." Bad leaders won't be able to advance, as troops won't follow them.

Sony has created a powerful engine, capable of the macro, like battles, and the micro, like the bullet marks on this vehicle.

You'll need to protect the interiors of your bases—particularly crucial spawn chambers like this one.

As players advance in command rank, they gain access to special command abilities. First and foremost among these abilities is access to command chat, which allows commanders to communicate with one another and organize everything from local tactics to global strategies. Other capabilities are reporting functions, through which information can trickle back and forth across the various command ranks, and even global broadcast capabilities for the highest-ranking members.

After three long years of development, the details are finally starting to bear fruit. Our time with *PlanetSide* was a blast—but we weren't paying. We'll know if gamers are buying sometime in the first half of next year.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment
GENRE: Massively multiplayer online shooter
URL: planetside.station.sony.com
RELEASE DATE: Q2 2003

will gamers buy in? By Raphael Liberatore

God's Hand
May
Sculpt mountains, gouge valleys, seed forests, and bring forth animals to create a world all your own
Summon volcanoes, release tornados, and call down meteors and lightning
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PC CD ROM

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Connect a massive region of SimCities, each sharing and competing for resources

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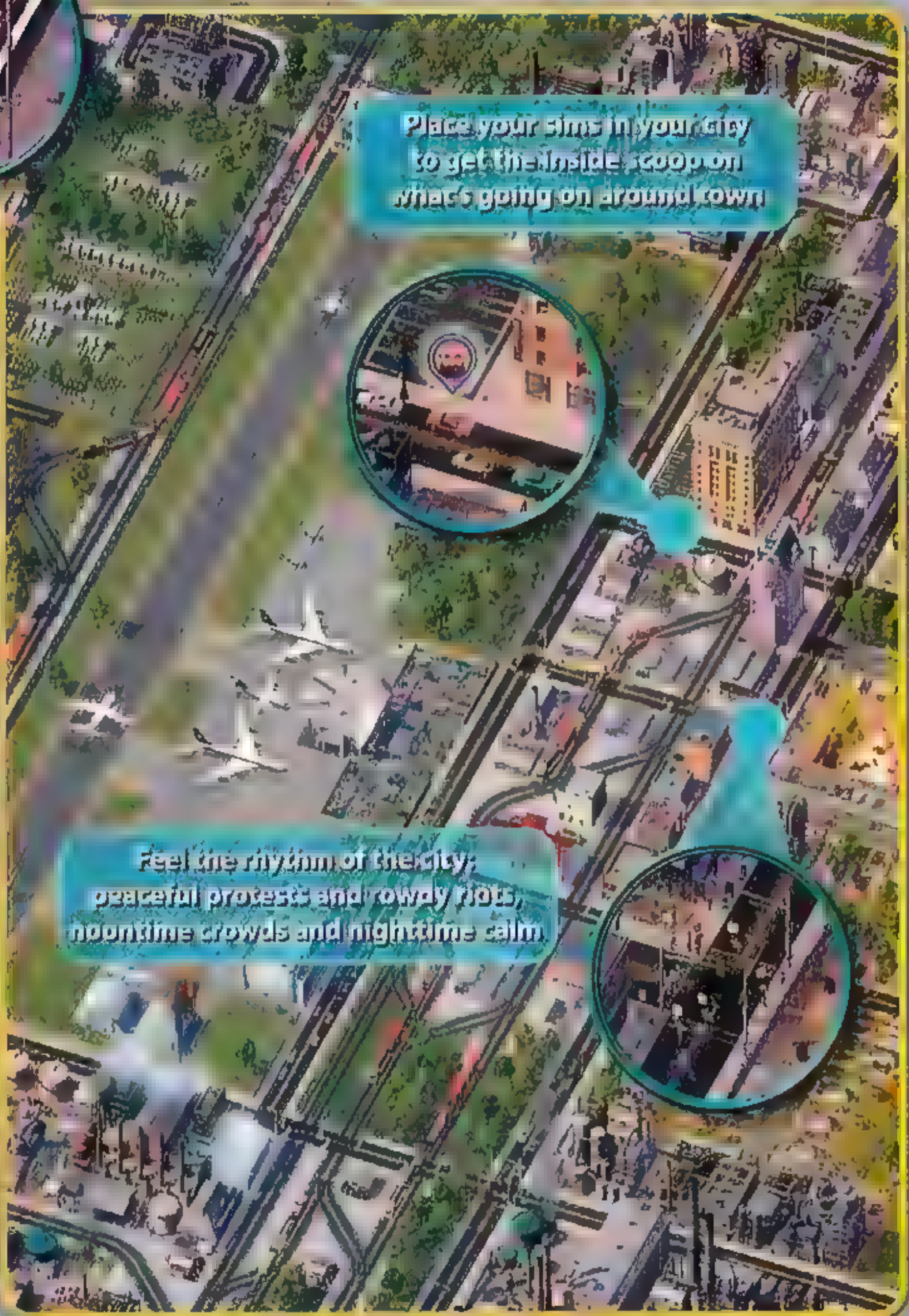

Place your sims in your city to get the inside scoop on what's going on around town

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Loadeding, Hot Property Award

Action Trip, Editors' Choice
Voodoo Extreme, Can 'o Whoopass
Zen Gamer, Gold Zen award
RPGDot, Editors' Choice
Xistenze, Choice award
VN Roundup, Stamp of Approval
WorthPlaying.com, Editors' Choice
Entertainment Depot, Editors' Choice

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TRON

Monolith reboots the movie and updates it 20 years later as a game

BY THIERRY NGUYEN

PUBLISHER Disney Interactive
DEVELOPER Monolith
GENRE First person shooter
URL www.tron20.net
RELEASE DATE March 2003

There is no new *Tron* movie. That's the official word from Disney.

But with the way Monolith is developing *Tron 2.0*—the PC game—you won't need to watch Bruce Boxleitner and Jeff Bridges flitter about onscreen. Instead, you can just lean back in your desk chair, play the game, and imagine it as a movie sequel.

Tron first came out in 1982, and the game reflects that 20-year gap: You play as Jet Bradley, the son of Alan Bradley (Bruce Boxleitner, who also provides his voice for the game). Alan suddenly and mysteriously disappears, and while investigating his father's fate, Jet is digitized into the *Tron* world, smack-dab in the middle of a big conflict among the three factions of the ICP, the Corruption, and fCon. And who knows—while navigating weird and wild levels like the Progress Bar or Internet Hub City, Jet just might run into the legendary Tron himself.

FILM 2 GAME

[illegible]

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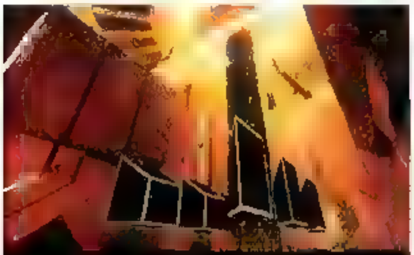
2.0

COLOR COORDINATION

The first thing you'll notice about *Tron 2.0* is the glow effect, courtesy of the LithTech Triton engine (an enhanced version of the LithTech Jupiter engine that powers *NOLF2*). Through sheer technical wizardry that I can't even begin to understand, LithTech Triton allows for an even more striking version of the soft, electronic glow in the movie. "If we didn't have the glow, we wouldn't have the game—it's that simple," says Eric Kohler, the art director for *Tron 2.0*.

The way the glow interacts with color is another important aspect of *Tron*'s design. Kohler explains, "The primary focus of the art design is the supersaturated color glow. More than in any other game, the simplicity of color was the key to the whole art direction." Color theory is used even in depicting various characters: The police are painted red, universally recognized as "stop," while the Corrupted are done in dizzying fluorescent yellow, and the power-hungry fCon are bathed in regal purple. Helpful neutrals display a cool, detached blue.



Simple polygons and a yellow glow make this Corrupted region look great.

In defining the look of the game, Disney gave Monolith free reign. "Even though we had the freedom to design an abstract computer world, we still had to make things recognizable, like doors and such. So, our only limitation was that we couldn't get too wacky," says Kohler.

He also adds, "Besides the movie itself, and the design work of Syd Mead and Moebius, the only other influence art-wise was anime. We looked at how anime uses shapes in designing cities and vehicles, and applied some of those principles to *Tron*."

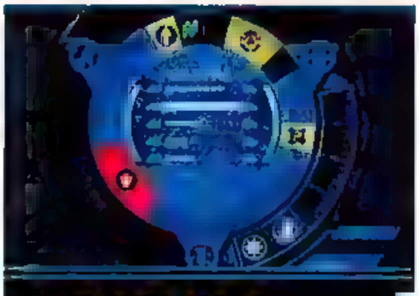
CYCLES OF DEATH

The most iconic aspect from the movie—the one that fanboys are most anxious to see—is the lightcycle race. And the vehicles make sense in the context of the game: They're not just random lightcycle levels to please *Tron* fans—they fit into the game plot as well as they did in the movie.

For example, in the first lightcycle level (the tutorial), Jet is captured and forced to race for freedom, much in the same way Flynn and Tron raced back in the movie. Lightcycles use just three controls: left, right, and camera control. Most races play pretty much like in the original arcade game or in the movie: You zip around and try to make three A.I. racers crash into the wall-trail that you leave behind. The camera automatically cuts to a third-person view, but you can alter the angle and zoom of the camera, and even switch to first-person mode.

Why the heck would you want to pilot the lightcycle in first-person, you ask? It will be

CONTINUED ON PAGE 72



UPGRADE YOURSELF

The subroutine menu in the game allows you to customize your character; pictured above is the interface that controls these subroutines. The edge of the circle represents all active subroutines, the blue areas indicate used RAM, and the black areas are free RAM to put subroutines in. Subroutines themselves each have three stages: alpha, beta, and gold. Alpha takes up the most space, gold the least. The middle is where all of your physical stats are, such as health and transfer rate, and where you assign build points every time you upgrade yourself. Finally, the three notches on the edge are port (convert unusable subroutines to usable), defrag (optimize free space), and disinfect (antivirus), which all help to maintain your subroutines.

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Lightcycle

Both the original lightcycle and the new supercycle make appearances in *Tron 2.0*. The old lightcycle is a bit faster, but the supercycle has an acceleration boost that kicks in whenever you're right next to another lightcycle.

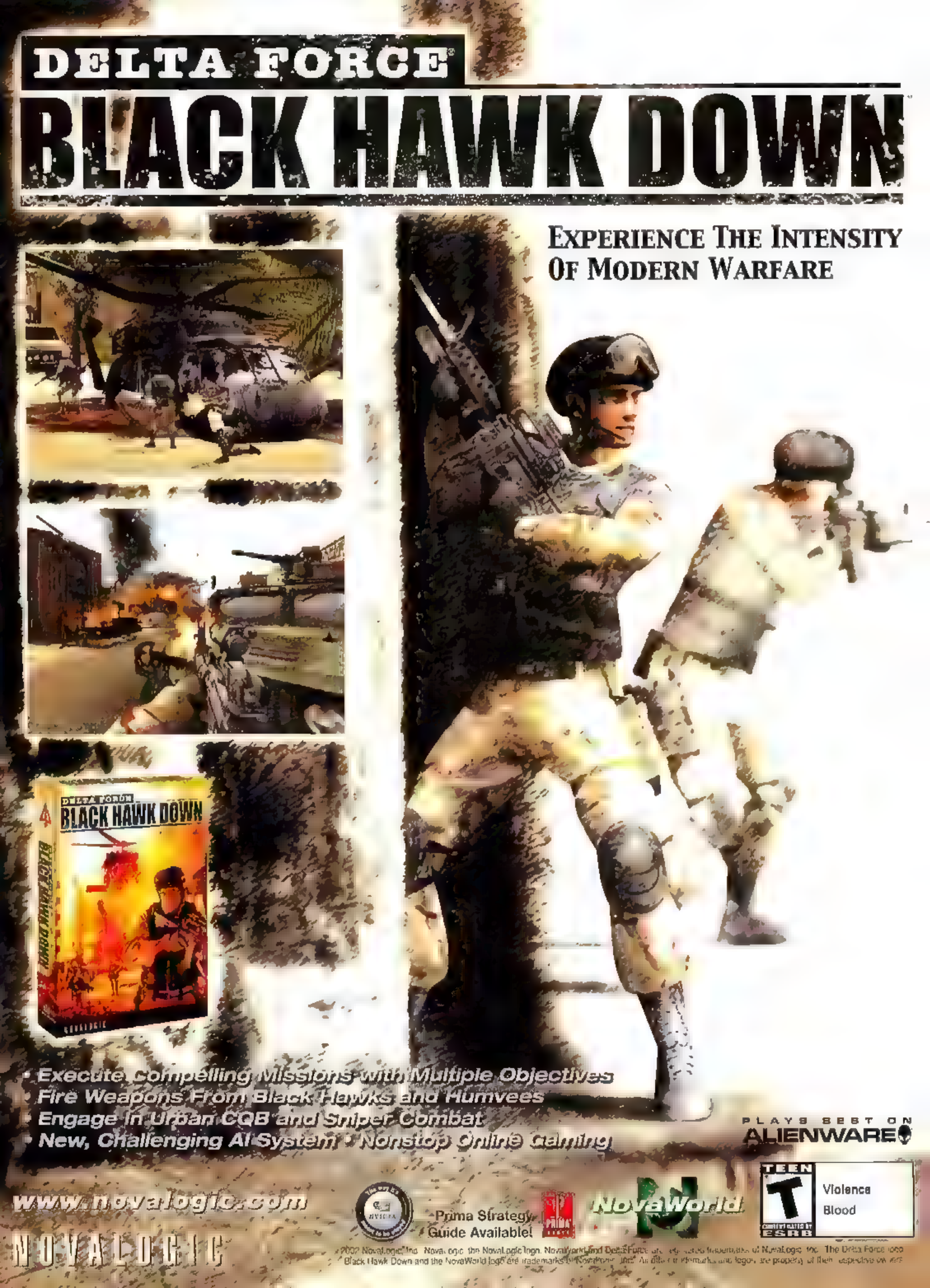
You'll participate in four to five lightcycle matches total. Each time you successfully complete a match, that arena will be unlocked and selectable from the game menu, so you can take a little lightcycle break if you feel like it. Unfortunately, network latency, plus the lightcycle's high speed, means that you won't be able to race against others in multiplayer.

The new supercycles will automatically accelerate whenever you're parallel to an opponent. You can also spit on your opponents, thanks to the open-faced design of the bike.

THE SUPERLIGHTCYCLE HAS AN ACCELERATION BOOST THAT KICKS IN AGAINST YOUR OPPONENTS.

Most of the lightcycle races will be in the traditional lightcycle arena...

...but some lightcycle levels will take place in cityscapes and exterior areas.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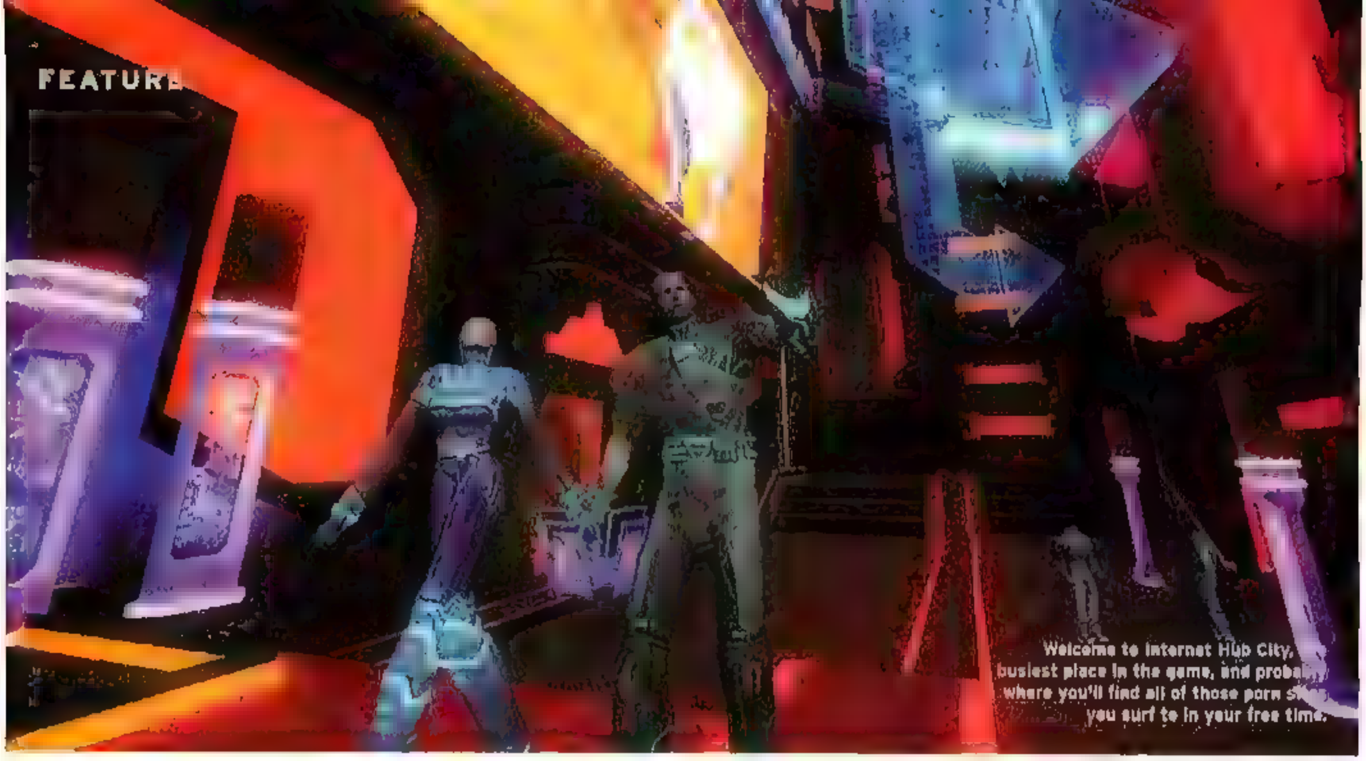


Welcome to Internet Hub City, busiest place in the game, and probably where you'll find all of those porn sites you surf to in your free time.

useful when you're being chased in the city.

That's right, besides lightcycle matches on the game grid, you'll also use lightcycles in chase sequences. You'll have to navigate the streets of a huge city (lightcycles are so fast that Monolith had to design large levels to drive them on), and since you just want to see where you're going it's better to be in first person for these scenes.

THE TRON ARENA

Another signature *Tron* aspect is the *Pong*-like arena games that the programs were forced to participate in. The developers realized this would be an ideal multiplayer environment.

Instead of a traditional Deathmatch mode ("This won't be *Quake* with *Tron* skins," says senior producer Cliff Kamida), there will be arena combat, just like in the movie. Two or more players will be placed on floating discs and will basically play a lethal version of *Pong*. Besides knocking the disc back and forth at each other, they can also destroy the ground underneath the opponent. Matches can be anywhere from one-on-one to (conceivably) six-on-six, depending on how the levels are designed. Currently, there will be five multiplayer arenas, including a Discs of Tron arena (straight from the movie) and an arena inside an Intel CPU. Monolith plans to release mod tools so users can make their own weird, abstract *Tron* arenas.

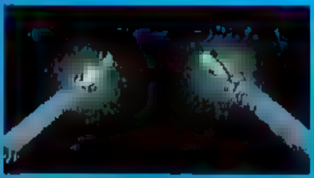
Spectator mode won't just be a free-floating camera, as in other games. Instead, you'll be an in-game spectator, watching from the skybox and waiting for the match to end so you can take on the winner. There will be free-for-all games (similar to exhibition matches) and organized tournaments, where the current champion wields a gold disc during the match.

TCP/IP A.I.

Enough with the movie references and rehashes: How does the game actually play? Some hands-on time revealed that it's a logical progression of Monolith's story-driven style when it comes to shooters. Thirty levels scattered across 11 missions make for lots of eye candy as mission locales range from Internet servers to the original Tron mainframe from the first movie. Puzzles within these levels include breaking through a firewall or tracking down the

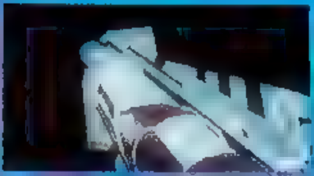
Weapons

You'll find four primitives, and each can be upgraded for two additional attacks, making a total of 12 different weapons. The left-mouse button handles primary fire, holding down left-mouse does any secondary fires, and the right-mouse is for defensive moves.



Melee stealth weapon, like a stun taser.

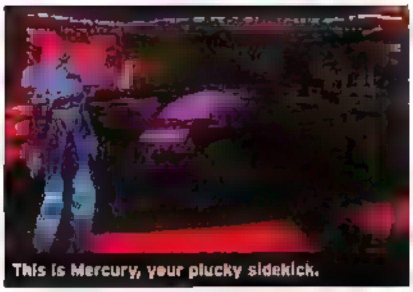
If you want better control when guiding a disc, use this version.

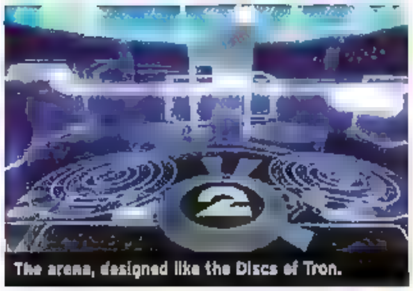


Like a shotgun, charge for a more powerful blast.

Hold down the left-mouse, and when you release, this disc explodes.

Sniper rifle for Tron.


This is Mercury, your plucky sidekick.


The arena, designed like the Discs of Tron.

source of corrupted data within an Internet hub.

A.I. for both enemies and friendlies has been tweaked specifically for *Tron 2.0*. Mercury—seen on the cover—is a friendly program (she is also a romantic interest, providing more character interaction between bouts of shooting), and she will often help Jet fulfill objectives. Ma3a—Alan Bradley's new A.I.—will provide objectives and advice. Sometimes you'll be able to ask NPCs for advice, and any pertinent info will be added to Jet's objectives screen; think of the NPCs as a built-in hint system to help players who are stuck. Enemies, such as the ICP, can and will call in reinforcements, and are smart enough to switch between melee and ranged weapons when appropriate.

USER UPGRADE

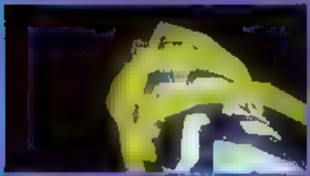
Then there's the whole role-playing aspect. Inspired by *System Shock 2*, and done invisibly in *NOLF* and visibly in *NOLF2*, you can customize your character so he can handle any situation. The heart of this is the subroutine menu, a disc that displays available subroutines and your vital stats. You'll find new subroutines (think of them as weapons or abilities) on enemies or data archives, and how many subroutines you can have active at once depends on the RAM of the computer you're in. So, if you're in a PDA, you can probably have just one subroutine active, but when you're in a huge Internet server, you can have almost everything you've collected active simultaneously. Subroutines include flash buffer, which makes weapons quieter megahertz for damage boosts, and fuzzy routines to make your footsteps quieter. Sometimes you'll accidentally pick up corrupted or virus-filled software and will need to do things like disinfect or defrag your system in order to repair yourself.

Additionally, you can get build nodes that increase your version number. You can then distribute these nodes to stats like health, energy, recharge, and so forth, in order to shape Jet's growth. He starts as version 1.0, and if you work hard enough, he can go all the way to 10. Lead designer Frank Rooke is hoping that players will use the subroutines and the build nodes to individualize Jet to their playing style.

Monolith's commitment to making a strong, cinematic game shows in everything in this design. Whether it's imagining the language that computer programs use in their speech to each other, figuring out what color glow to put on different characters, or designing what a PDA level would look like, *Tron 2.0* looks like a game designed to capture the interest of both hardcore gamers and *Tron* fans who haven't kept up with computer gaming. Who needs a new *Tron* movie when you can play the story instead?

A manually thrown grenade.

[illegible]


[illegible]

This energy claw has a force gr[illegible]

Launches five "drunken" missiles, saturating an area with rocket fire.

Prankster missi[illegible] guided in flight.

SYD MEAD [illegible]S TRON WORK AND DESIGN

Syd Mead is best-known for his work on the design concepts for *Tron* and *Blade Runner*. We caught up with him to see what he thought about *Tron 2.0*.

CGW: How much of the game have you seen? How involved are you with it?
SYD: I last saw the game at E3 and got to look at the firewall level in particular. The art team did a good job of maintaining the movie's look and feel while updating it. My sole contribution to the game is designing the new supercycles.
CGW: What were the major differences in designing the old lightcycles for the movie and the new ones in the game?
[illegible] Well, due to the limitation of technology at the time, the old lightcycles were more of an exercise in design with solid, geometric shapes rather than actual car or motorcycle design. In fact, the reason the lightcycles were closed is because computers couldn't properly animate a person riding one at the time. For the new supercycles, I had to reacquaint myself with current motorcycle design. I just went to my bookstore and bought magazines and books to see how people customized theirs, and what manufacturers are making nowadays.
CGW: Do you think sci-fi design was better back in '82 (when Mead designed both *Tron* and *Blade Runner*)—with limited tools and technology—or nowadays, with CGI being used everywhere?
SYD: In my mind, limitations of technology make you work harder and result in better overall design. Most of the CGI designwork I see nowadays resembles demo reels from Industrial Light & Magic rather than artistic and conceptual design. Basically, you can have a really bad idea, and all you can get from those multimillion-dollar computers is a multimillion-dollar bad idea.

90 out of 100 "A feast for the eyes and mind, an excellent game and a perfect example of what an MMORPG should be."

Matt Leyendecker, ActionTrip.com

9.5 out of 10 "Totally absorbing, a game that I'll be playing long after this review is posted."

Jason MacIsaac, Electric Playground

GOOD NEWS

"Earth & Beyond continues to impress with great graphics and great gameplay."

Jeff Green, Computer Gaming World

"...Earth & Beyond shows a lot of style and a lot of vision."

Chris Hudak, Computer Games Magazine

"Earth & Beyond should offer the hardcore sci-fi crowd the persistent-world game they've been waiting for."

Rob Smith, Editor-in Chief, PC Gamer

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Blood
Violence
The content of this game may change due to interactive exchanges.

91 out of 100 "Best MMORPG ever? Very possibly."
Jakub Wojnarowicz, Firing Squad

9.3 out of 10 "As far as MMO games go you really don't get much better than this."
Paul Younger, Loadedinc.com

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"It's gonna save PC gaming as we know it." CGW

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Unreal II
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD'S 2002

HOLIDAY BUYER'S GUIDE

DON'T BUY LAME PRESENTS! CHECK OUT CGW'S PICKS OF THE BEST PC GAMES AND HARDWARE TO GIVE TO THE NAUGHTY AND NICE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.

BY THE CGW EDITORS
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN UELAND

OH BOY—IT'S THE HOLIDAYS AGAIN. [illegible] our annual nondenominational Holiday Gift Guide.

[illegible] With our handy guide, you can simply choose from amongst [illegible] the one you give.

SERGEANT SLAUGHTER

Guns and ammo—that's how to solve a big problem, and that's what keeps Amurika strong! And our man Slaughter knows how to use 'em: Deadnuts accurate at 500 yards, this guy can kill anything given the right weapon, whether it be a rifle or a P-51. His motto: When there's killin' to be done, Sergeant Slaughter's gonna have some fun.

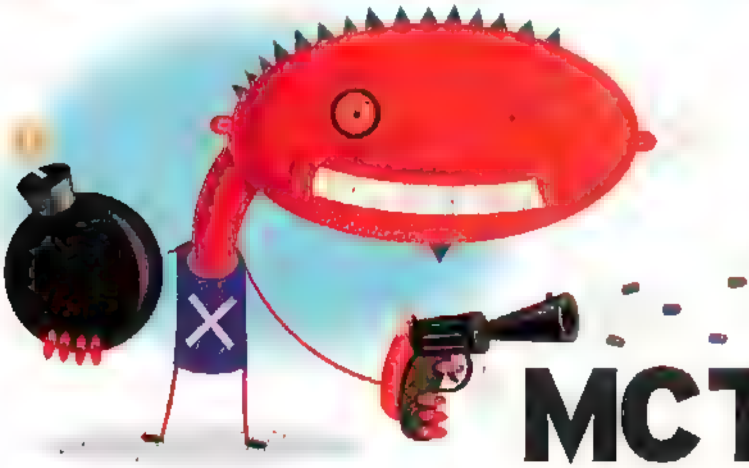
▲ **BATTLEFIELD 1942** The WWII game for John Wayne types who want to send their enemies to hell. It's a simple-to-learn shooter, but there's a ton of variety in weapons, settings, and controllable vehicles (including tanks, planes, ships, and submarines). Quite possibly the multiplayer game of the year.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD *CGW*'s Game of the Year for 2001 is the closest you can get to a military experience outside of Camp Lejeune. This Gold Edition adds new missions, vehicles, weapons, and the official strategy guide. Trust us, you'll need it.

COMBAT FLIGHT SIM 3 ▶ Third time's the charm for Microsoft's signature WWII flight sim, filled with spectacular visuals, detailed aircraft, and realistic terrain. For flight fans and war buffs, this is the one to own.

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT It's like living out a World War II movie as you fight from North Africa to the heart of Germany itself (with the add-on Operation Spearhead). You even get to drive over Nazis in a stolen Tiger tank. Krunch!

SPLINTER CELL Think *Metal Gear Solid* done in signature Tom Clancy, techno-thriller style. Sneak, spy, and assassinate your way through the game, enjoying both the nice toys (including a nerve gas-emitting camera) and the new *Unreal II* engine.



ITCHY MCTRIGGER

This is the action fan, the guy whose favorite movies are *Terminator 2, Aliens, Armageddon, The Matrix*, and the *Die Hard* trilogy. He likes to see things explode. All the games here involve all-out action (whether it's using guns-guns-guns or lightsabers or big robots), which should satisfy his twitchy, visceral mind.

NAPPY O'LEON

He's small, he's organized, he's clever and devious—he's a total pain in the ass. He may just be the assistant night manager at Wendy's, but in his mind, he's the micromanaging last line of defense between liberty and total anarchy. Indulge his fantasies of power with these games, and he'll be so preoccupied that you'll finally get to test that theory involving his hand and the deep fryer.

CIVILIZATION III AND CIV III: PLAY THE WORLD *Civ III* is the ultimate strategy game. The *Play the World* expansion pack makes it, um, ultimater. Besides adding new civs and units, the expansion pack offers three different styles of multiplayer action. If you don't have this in your collection, you're no gamer—you're a poser.

▲ **MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR** A game so mind-bogglingly huge it may just push all other knowledge from your brain. The incredibly deep, turn-based strategy could sustain five other games, but this sucker throws in a rich, sprawling, real-time tactical game to boot, brilliantly bringing medieval siege warfare to life.

SIMGOLF Does the seemingly impossible: It makes golf fun. The product of a Vulcan mind-meld between gaming gurus Sid Meier and Will Wright, *SimGolf* is a refreshing, witty take on the overcrowded tycoon genre, letting gamers design, manage, and even play their own golf courses.

EARTH AND BEYOND ▶ Has your little control freak run out of things to conquer? Then blast his ass into space with this massively multiplayer online space RPG. Humbled by the vastness of space and other players, it will be possible for Nappy to content himself with micromanaging character stats and ship design.

GET A LIFE HOLIDAY EDITION

STUFF TO DO WHEN ALL YOUR GAMES SUCK

BAND OF BROTHERS DVD BOX SET HBO's amazing WWII miniseries comes to DVD [illegible] featuring not only every episode but also [illegible] on the making of the series and a documentary with the surviving members of the 101st Airborne. As gripping as the combat scenes are, it's the human aspect of the drama that will stick with you long [illegible]

BECK—SEA CHANGE What happens when a smart-alecky singer-songwriter with a penchant for irony and funk gets depressed? He drops the irony and funk and makes his masterpiece. An overwhelmingly sad and beautiful CD, *Sea Change* won't ignite any parties, but it'll get you through those 3 a.m. [illegible]

100 BULLETS [illegible] mature diversion [illegible] comic-related, don't miss this outstanding crime noir series, which begins as [illegible] but quickly morphs into a complex paranoid espionage thriller of *X-Files* proportions. Now in cool trade paperbacks from Vertigo Comics.

CIVILIZATION: THE BOARDGAME Here's a chance for you *Civ* diehards to get your family and friends into the game. *Sid Meier's Civilization: The Boardgame* features a huge game board and 884 miniature pieces representing typical *Civ* units from [illegible] historical periods. [illegible] different [illegible]

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2: A SPY IN H.A.R.M.'S WAY ▶ This brilliant spy-comedy shooter is the *Casino Royale* of first-person shooters. A witty script, great A.I., stunning graphics, and an easy-on-the-eyes heroine make this a top pick for any shooter fan.

JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST For the fan who waited overnight for *Attack of the Clones* tickets—just to see Yoda with a lightsaber. This game gives the chance to use awesome force powers, explore crazy space locales, and practice swashbuckling with a personal lightsaber.

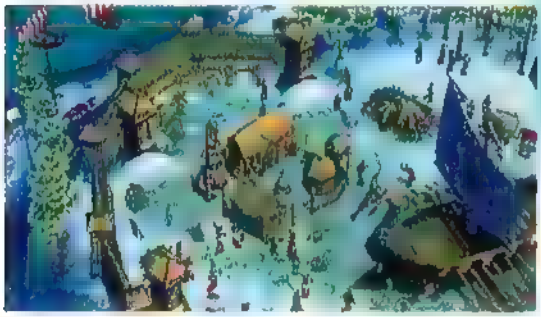
▲ **GRAND THEFT AUTO III** Think of it as a pastiche of *Goodfellas*, *The Fast and the Furious*, and *Morrowind*. Your little street thug has the freedom to unleash his own inner capo on some A.I. street thugs while still enjoying the mission structure and driving elements.

MECHWARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES Giant robots shooting and beating the crap out of each other—it's like driving a monster tank with legs. With missions across multiple planets, arena combat, great visuals, and an economy model, your robogeek can pretend to be a hard-edged mercenary inside a huge robot.

DUKE NUKEM: MANHATTAN PROJECT The only good *Duke Nukem* game you'll see for a while, this goes back to *Duke*'s roots as a side-scroller. Filled with just as much action as its first-person cousin, this little game is a perfect mix of all-out action and price.

ARTY VON WARLOCK

Think of Arty as the eccentric, fey cousin to Nappy O'Leon. He, too, wants to conquer the world, but he doesn't want to do it the old-fashioned way, with swords and guns. No, Arty is more the Saruman type, training Orcs and wielding magic spells to accomplish his imperialistic goals. Stay out of his way, or he'll turn you into a newt.

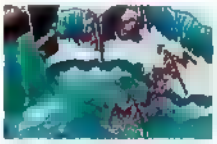


▲ **AGE OF MYTHOLOGY** Zounds! Ensemble's long-awaited follow up to the *Age of Empires* series is as gorgeous and fun and addictive as you'd expect. And this time, they even got the single-player game right. Go ahead—give Bill Gates more money.

AGE OF WONDERS II: THE WIZARD'S THRONE Forget *Heroes of Might and Magic*—this is the best turn-based, fantasy strategy series going right now, with gorgeous 3D graphics and an excellent balance of resource-management, city-building, and combat. A must-have for the budding Gandalf in your life.

CELTIC KINGS: RAGE OF WAR Here's your chance to relive Jeff Green's youth, as the Romans and Gauls fight it out on ancient European battlegrounds. A nice blend of strategy gaming and role-playing, *Celtic Kings* is surprisingly fresh.

DISCIPLES II: DARK PROPHECY Strategy First's follow-up to their sleeper fantasy-strategy game improves on the original in every respect, including a major graphics overhaul. Darker, grittier, and tougher than *Age of Wonders II*, think of this as the Saruman to *AOW*'s Gandalf.



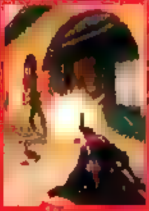
WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS ▶ Yay! Orcs and Humans are back—and this time, they brought the Night Elves and Undead with them. Blizzard's latest entry in its beloved fantasy series has the kind of stunning, high-quality production values you'd expect from a blockbuster movie. Get it.

DUMPSTER DIVER
HOLIDAY EDITION

We won't be judgmental and call you a cheapskate. Maybe you just spent all your money on that elusive Yes Face figurine in the original packaging. Whatever the [illegible] [illegible] great games for $20 or less.

Aliens Versus Predator 2 $20

[illegible] $10



No One Lives Forever $20

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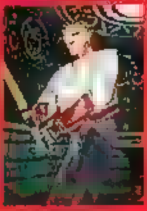

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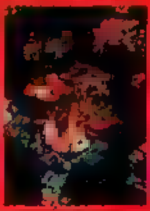
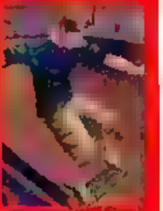
[illegible] Monkey Island $10



[illegible] Chest $20



[illegible] Raider 2 $10

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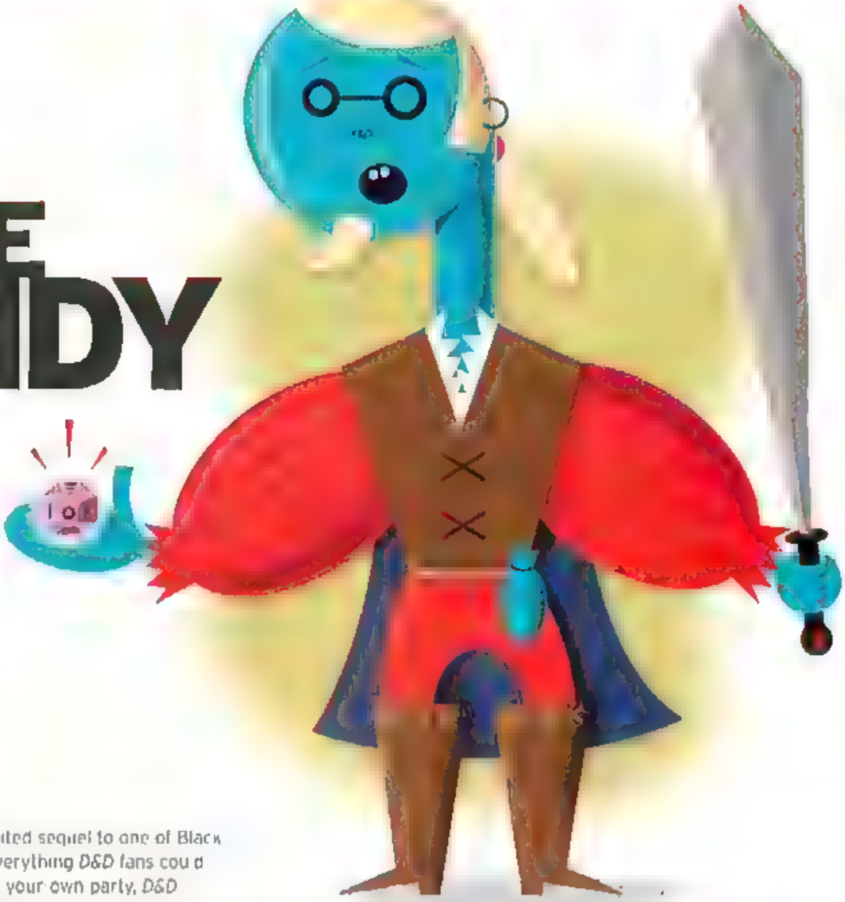
REN FAIRE RANDY



When this pale, ponytailed, 10-sided-dice-carrying dweeb talks about the "good old days," he's talking about 12th-century Britain. For him, civilization has been on a permanent downward spiral ever since Arthur pulled the sword from the stone. The real world makes him cry, so he plays fantasy role-playing games, dresses up in frooty robes, casts +1 Spells of Dorkitude, and repeatedly watches his *Lord of the Rings* Platinum Series Extended Edition Collector's Gift Set DVD.

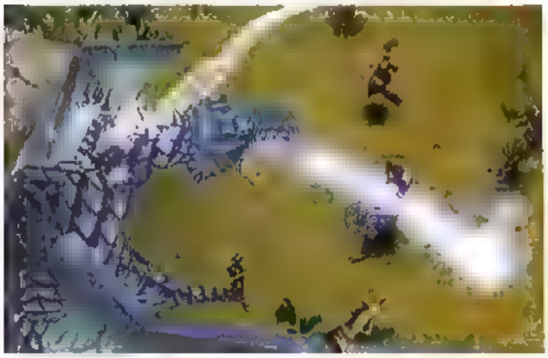
ICEWIND DALE II The long-awaited sequel to one of Black Isle Studios' best RPGs delivers everything *D&D* fans could hope for: an old fashioned, create-your-own party, *D&D* dorkfest with a great story and intense combat. Yeah, the engine is showing its age, but this game is still hardcore RPG gaming at its finest.

▲ **THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND** Gigantic, epic, beautiful: this hugely ambitious RPG is probably Bethesda's masterpiece, and is one of the best RPGs of the last decade. There's an entire world to get lost in here, for hundreds of hours. Put down those lame Robert Jordan novels and start playing this instead.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS Bioware's next-generation RPG is more than just another massive *D&D* game. It's a game design revolution, providing all the tools for gamers to create their own *D&D* adventures and then share them online. Probably the best multiplayer RPG so far this year.

FREEDOM FORCE Finally! ▶ A superhero game on the PC that not only doesn't suck, but is actually awesome—and on our shortlist for overall Game of the Year. Command a team of '60s-style super heroes in this deep, brilliantly crafted, and often hilarious homage to Silver Age Comics. Best. Comic game. Ever!

DUNGEON SIEGE A bit more lightweight than the other entries here, *Dungeon Siege* still delivers satisfying *Diablo*-esque hack-and-slash action for those who'd rather kill and collect stuff than wade through story and dialogue. Good mindless fun between marathon sessions of *Morrowind*. ▼



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JACQUES STRAPPE

The epitome of the armchair quarterback, Jacques whiles away the hours he should be at the gym losing his beer gut studying stat sheets for his fantasy basketball league while recording NASCAR, NFL, MLB, and some Canadian curling championship on multiple TiVos. Jacques dreams of being Michael Jordan, Barry Bonds, Jeff Gordon, and Serena Williams (especially Serena) wrapped into one super-buffed-out Überathlete. If only he could get his fat ass off the couch.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 What's the must-have first-person shooter of 2003 doing in the sports section? Because it's the sporting league of the future, where players blast each other with rocket launchers and energy streams while their managers deal with salary caps and cranky players who look like they're from Mars. Just like today.

MADDEN NFL 2003 ▶ After all these years, the *Madden* franchise is still going strong. This year's installment is the best ever, finally rivaling its console cousins. New features include minicamp, improved online options, and the ability to play your own MP3s while you're gaming. Now, that's good football!

US OPEN 2002 Nobody knew how much they needed a good tennis game on the PC until one came along. That game is *US Open 2002*, and while it doesn't have some of the bigger names like the Williams sisters, it is a great tennis sim. Not to mention highly addictive.

FORMULA 1 RACING/GRAND PRIX 4 If you can't get enough hardcore Formula 1 racing action, then you're in luck. There are two fantastic racing games out there for you right now: *Grand Prix 4* and *Formula 1 Racing*. In fact, they're both so good, it's hard for us to recommend one over the other.

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE ▶ If you prefer your racing with a little more dirt, check out this Xbox port, which features great driving physics and a host of tracks and cars. It also serves up drop-dead gorgeous visuals.

YER MAMA

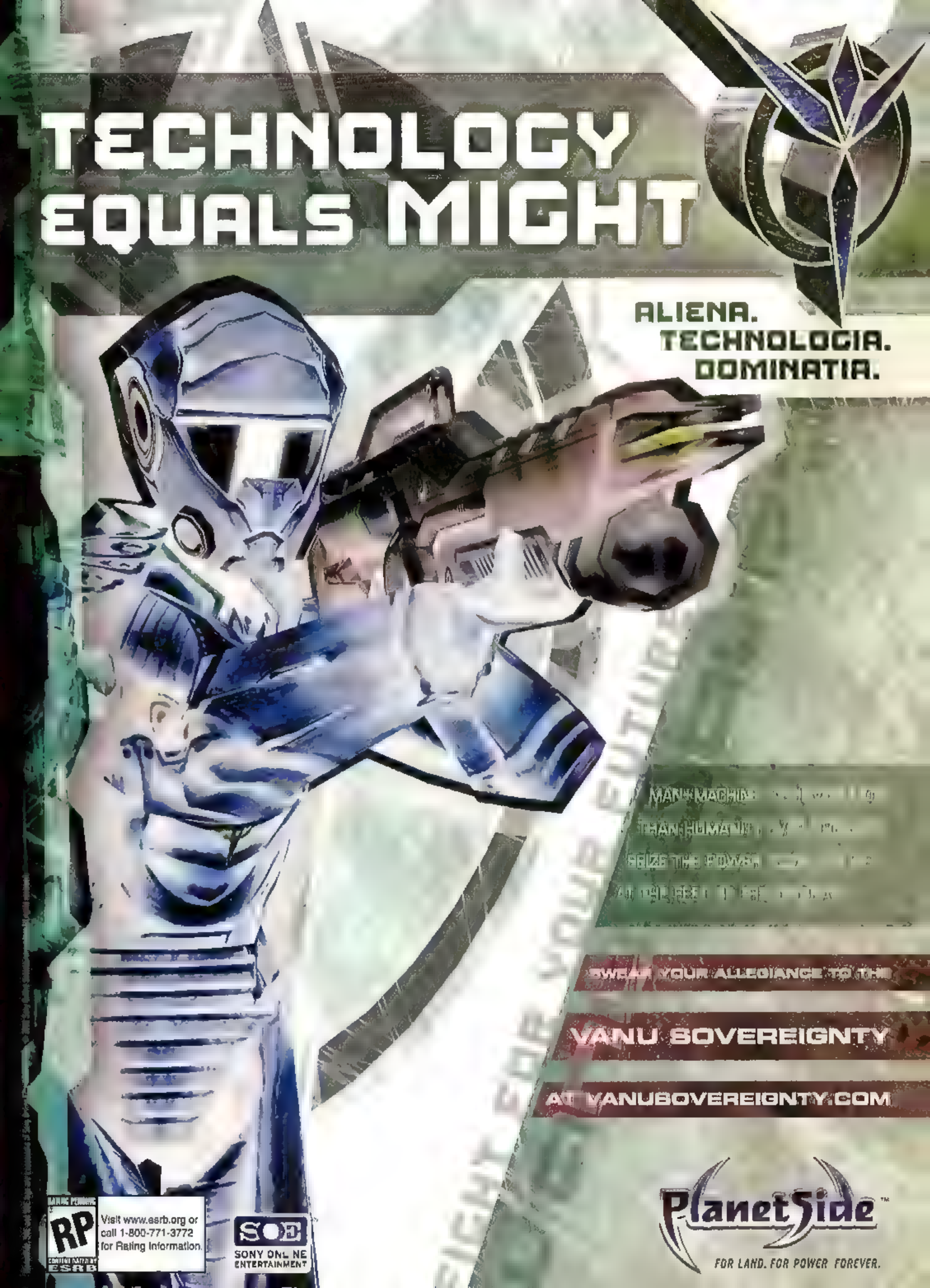
She gave you life—isn't it about time you gave her something other than an overwhelming sense of despair? She tried to love you, and now it's your chance to return that gesture with gifts that say, "Sorry about losing your prosthetic hand." These newbie-friendly titles will help break up day-long crying jags spent staring at your high school portrait.

THE SIMS ONLINE Normal people playing online as normal people may seem profoundly redundant and pointless. We admit it, we were skeptical, too—until we spent some time alienating mankind in this lovingly twisted alternate reality. This is the title that'll truly bring online gaming to the masses.

THE SIMS DELUXE Give ▶ Mama one complete package containing *The Sims*, the *Livin' Large* expansion pack, some brand-new content, and a handy creator tool that will let mommy slap your ugly mug on her virtual kids—right before she locks them in the closet.

◀ **SYBERIA** This European import combines gorgeous art, challenging puzzles, and an intriguing story into one nifty package. Any game that starts with a funeral has gotta be good, right?

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2 *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* gives Mom a chance to build, design, and manage a series of theme parks. New tools and real world Six Flags attractions should make it even more addictive.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TECHNOLOGIA.
DOMINATIA.
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MAN + MACHINE [illegible]
THAN HUMANITY [illegible]
SEIZE THE POWER [illegible]
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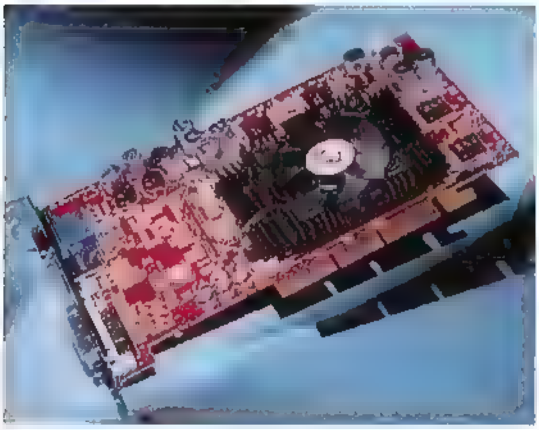
INSPECTOR GADGET

The guy who has the latest everything: cell phone, PDA, the hottest computer, an iPod MP3 player, and superchic sunglasses. Too bad he still can't get a date. Maybe that's because he only speaks technojargon, or because he's too busy trying to keep all his gadgets working

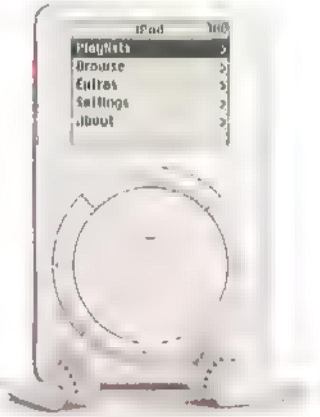


▲ **128MB ATI RADEON 9700 PRO** ATI's so-called GeForce4 killer is the must-have peripheral for hardcore gamers. With hardware shaders and support for DirectX 8.1 (and eventually true AGP 8x support), machines running this card are blowing the pants off of their GeForce4 Ti 4600-powered competition. For proof, flip to the Ultimate Gaming Machine story every machine was rocking the Radeon 9700 Pro.

INTEL 3GHZ PENTIUM 4 PROCESSOR WITH 533MHZ FSB With its new Hyper-Threading technology, which essentially creates two logical processors from one physical one, Intel is hoping to give us a reason (other than pure power) to get excited over its latest CPU

CAMBRIDGE ▶ SOUNDWORKS MEGAWORKS 510D SPEAKERS These speakers bump. Since we got a set a few months ago, they've supplanted Klipsch's ProMedia 5.1s as our speakers of choice Pushing 500 watts (total power), you'll easily alienate neighbors, roommates, and spouses alike as you play everything from *UT2003* to *Madden* to music and DVDs

LOGITECH MOMO RACING FORCE FEEDBACK WHEEL The "low end" version of last year's $200 Logitech MOMO Force Wheel. If you were excited about last year's model, but the idea of dropping $200 was too much for the wife to stomach, then the Logitech MOMO Racing Wheel is a significantly easier pill to swallow at only $100.



APPLE IPOD Sure, ▶ it's $500, but it also holds 20GB of stuff—a much better deal than 64MB for $130. Once you've broken the 1,000-song mark, you just can't go back to CDs. The only downside is that it requires FireWire support—but that's easily fixed by either a cheap FireWire card or a Sound Blaster Audigy.

SAMSUNG A500 CELL PHONE Offered through Sprint, this slick and colorful cell phone is going to make every other geek see green. Once you start downloading games like *Pac-Man*, browsing the Web, or playing the *Hawaii 5-0* theme song, you might forget you can make phone calls with it

SONY CLIE NR-70V No, this isn't part of James Bond's arsenal, but it is one of the coolest-looking PDAs to come along in quite a while. This Palm OS handheld has a swiveling screen, a minikeyboard, a headphone jack to listen to MP3s and a digital camera for those times when you need to stalk your neighb—err, your prey.

DEOTARD AND SPEAKER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TICSEJO

THE ONLY MEDALS THEY'RE GOING TO GET IS SHRAPNEL
Microsoft game studios
EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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Combat Flight Simulator 3
Battle For Europe

LIVE THE LEGEND...

It has gameplay that we all are familiar with, but it adds a unique setting and clever mission design.

- Gamespot -

Fun and dynamic gameplay

Use cunning or might to complete missions

Play as Robin Hood, Little John, Maid Marian and other

Stunning graphics and realistic atmospheric conditions

Robin Hood

THE LEGEND OF SHERWOOD

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IN STORES NOW!

Take on the role of the legendary nobleman, Robin Hood or one of his Merry Men and play over 30 different missions that combine action and adventure with stealth tactical elements as you battle for control of the King's throne in the stunning, lush backdrop of Sherwood Forest.

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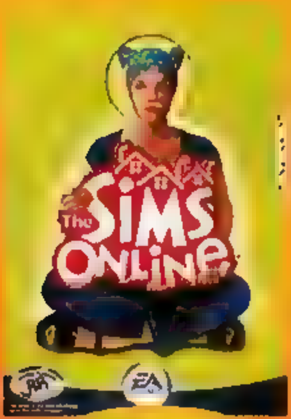
The Sims Online
EA

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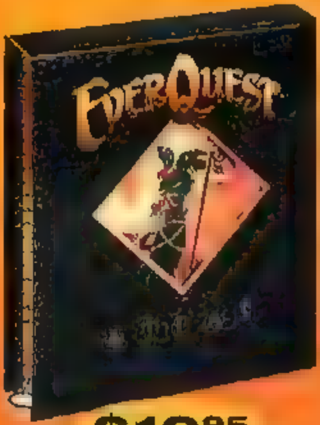
The Sims Online
EA



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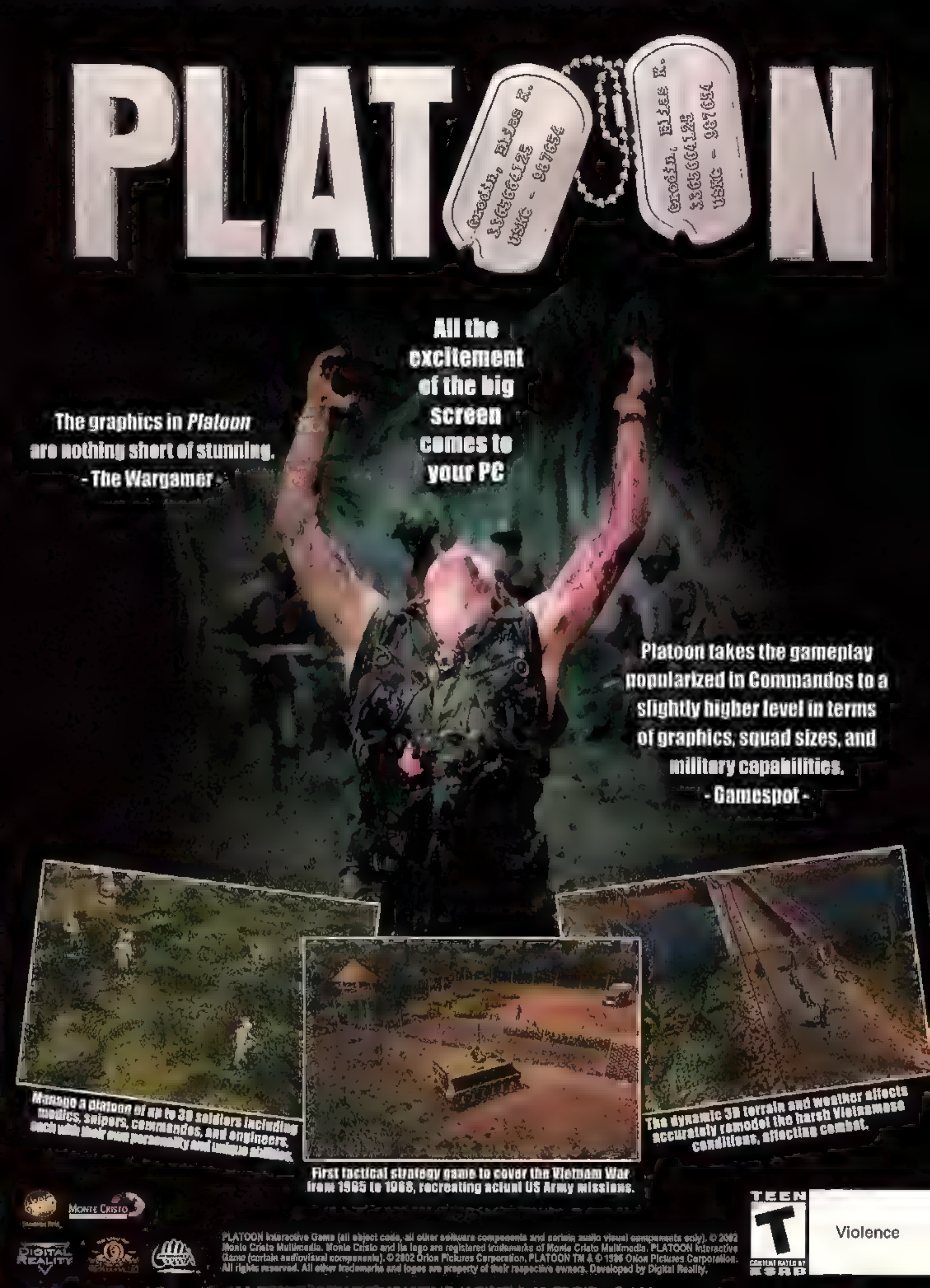
PLATOON



All the excitement of the big screen comes to your PC

The graphics in *Platoon* are nothing short of stunning.
- The Wargamer -

Platoon takes the gameplay popularized in Commandos to a slightly higher level in terms of graphics, squad sizes, and military capabilities.
- Gamespot -

Manage a platoon of up to 30 soldiers including medics, snipers, commandos, and engineers, each with their own personality and unique abilities.

First tactical strategy game to cover the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1968, recreating actual US Army missions.

The dynamic 3D terrain and weather affects accurately remodel the harsh Vietnamese conditions, affecting combat.

MONTE CRISTO

TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

Ghost Recon: Island Thunder

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How Do We Rate?

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches

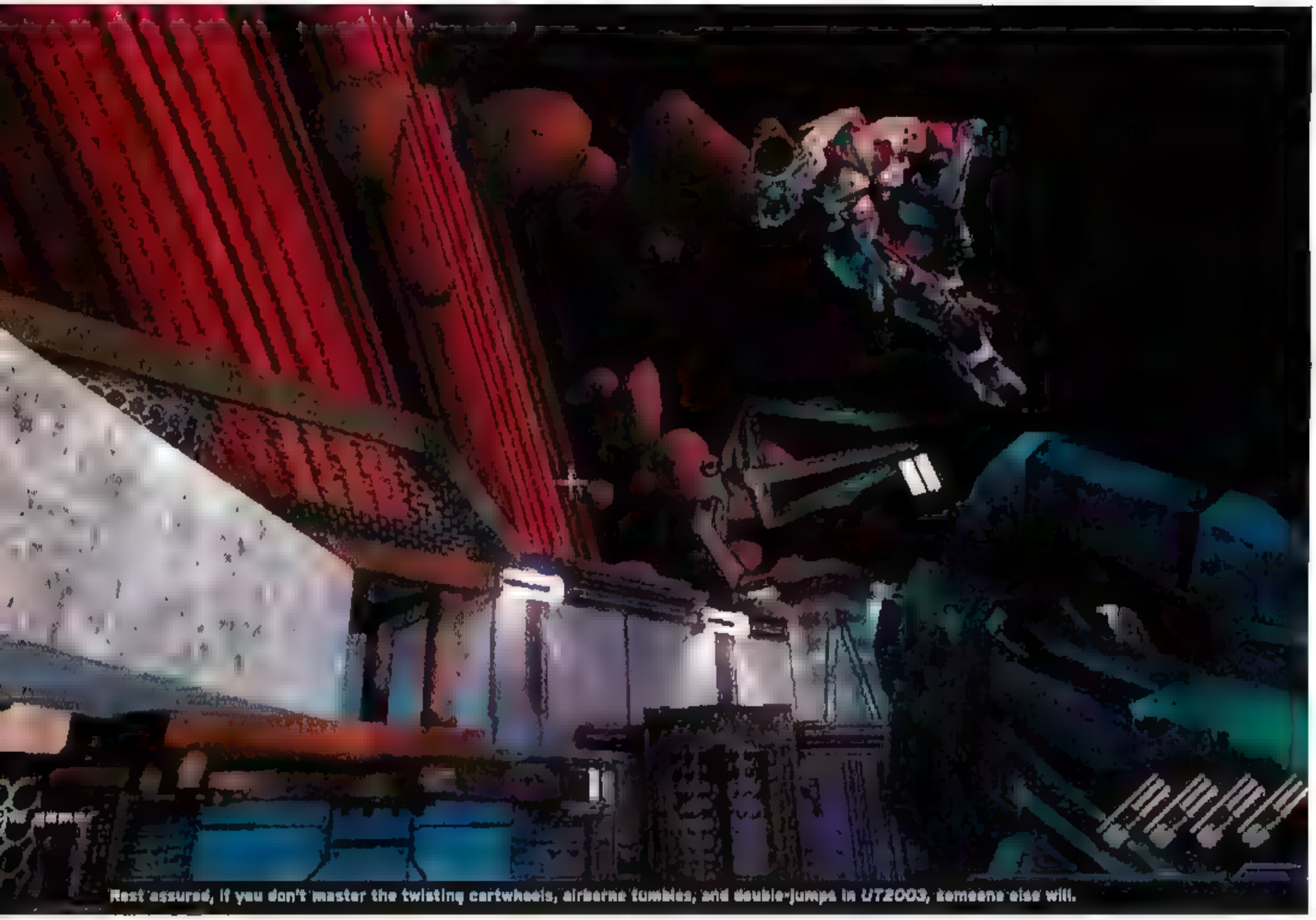
★★★★★ **OUTSTANDING** The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★☆ **VERY GOOD** Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★☆☆ **AVERAGE** Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★☆☆☆ **WEAK** Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★☆☆☆☆ **ABYSMAL** The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.



Rest assured, if you don't master the twisting cartwheels, airborne tumbles, and double-jumps in *UT2003*, someone else will.

Unreal Tournament 2003

Next on ESPN: Are sports too violent for kids? **By Jeanne Kim Trais**

PUBLISHER **Infogrames/Atari** DEVELOPER **Epic Megagames/Digital Extremes** GENRE **First-person shooter** URL **www.unrealtournament2003.com** ESRB RATING **Mature; blood, violence, strong language** PRICE **$49.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 733, 128MB RAM, 3GB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER **LAN, Internet (2-32 players)**

"Cyberathlete"—CNN newscasters love the word's buzzworthiness. It's every JAr_jAr's, bOObS, and ^Boner^'s dream in TCP/IP land to earn that title. And for those lucky enough to achieve frag elite status, it's all about the bucks, babes, and Pentium-GeForce-Audigy booty! All this glory at gamers' fingertips! Yes? Yes! Or at least that's what *Unreal Tournament 2003*'s trying to say with its faster, more arcade-like, sports-inspired gameplay. By taking the backbone of its predecessor, *Unreal Tournament*, and fleshing it out with muscle straight from the WWE, *UT2003* takes a big step toward establishing the football of the future. Well, maybe.

At the kick-off, *UT2003*'s outstanding graphics trigger immediate oohs and aahs. Fiery, alive, and cascading skies, huge, low-gravity levels rushing through space a la *The Philadelphia Experiment*, and hypnotic jungles heavy with moisture and teeming with alien life all leave permanent visual imprints. Add excellent—not to mention entertaining—rag-doll physics to the mix, and deaths take on a life of their own, so to speak. No one in their right mind would argue that this game doesn't have eye candy in the bag. But it's too bad the music and sound effects don't match the visual quality. When turning up the volume becomes a viable way to keep weapons sound effects from falling flat in the face of action, it's hard not to be bummed. And what's with the over-exuberant sportscaster announcer and overdone, childish taunts? They do the job, but it doesn't take a Danny Elfman to realize that pairing sportscasts with ambient, trance-like soundscapes (instead of an adrenaline-pumping score) isn't going to give thrill seekers what they're looking for. Looks like it's one point for visuals and minus one for sounds. Eh. On to gameplay.

Get close, but not too close, with the lightning gun—perfect for snooping on couples like this one as they settle a domestic dispute.

Breakfast of champions

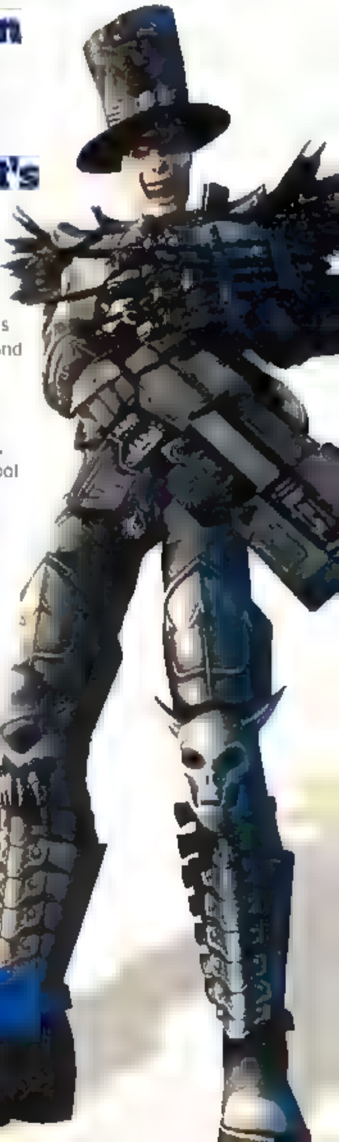
UT2003 definitely eats its Wheaties—it's fast. New acrobatic moves can make one practically untouchable. Adrenaline power-ups triggered by key combos enable invisibility, hyperspeed, extra strength, and even regenerative and defensive powers. And most importantly, *UT2003*'s weapons ask more from their

Looks like it's just you, me, and Mr. Rocket Launcher.

Thanks to UT2003's rag-doll physics engine, deaths like these are classic. That is, for the one that's still alive.

Bombing Run is an all-right mode if you really like mixing guns and football.

It all boils down to one thing for most folks: Is it fun? Yeah. But it's no *Unreal Tournament*.



masters. Sure, old friends like the rocket launcher have significantly less-powerful effects, and new weapons like the sniper-lightning gun offer no easy shortcuts to kills. But this newly balanced arsenal of death tools (especially in comparison to the weaponry in *UT*) requires players to be calculating in their actions, hone their skills, and perfect their personas in the arena. Remember, this is a sport. But why the developers stopped there is a mystery. One can polish and tweak the same old weapon all he wants, but at the end of the day, it's the same old weapon. Nostalgia is nice, but this arsenal lacks the distinction and variety that made (for better or worse) adoring flak whores and minigun-whores out of us in *UT*. It's not that endorphins don't flow freely after a few 16/16 deathmatches in *UT2003*: it's just that the chances of falling in love aren't what they used to be.

Smooth runs with minimal lag burps and slowdowns are a huge plus since levels sprawl out in every direction, seemingly forever. In Deathmatches, locales are huge, with a good mix of sharp corners and open plazas, lengthy corridors for choice sniping, and crowded rooms where blood and body parts get down and boogie. Levels are scaled down a bit in Double Domination matches, but the methods of obtaining those domination points now vary from craggy crevices of rock for squeezing through to brightly lit arrows at hyper-jump points signaling where to go. Capture the Flag levels offer plenty of twisting tunnels and alternate routes to bases, for sneaking in for the snatch. The weakest mode is *UT2003*'s newbie Bombing Run, mainly because it's specifically designed for the minority of players who like a little football with their fragging.

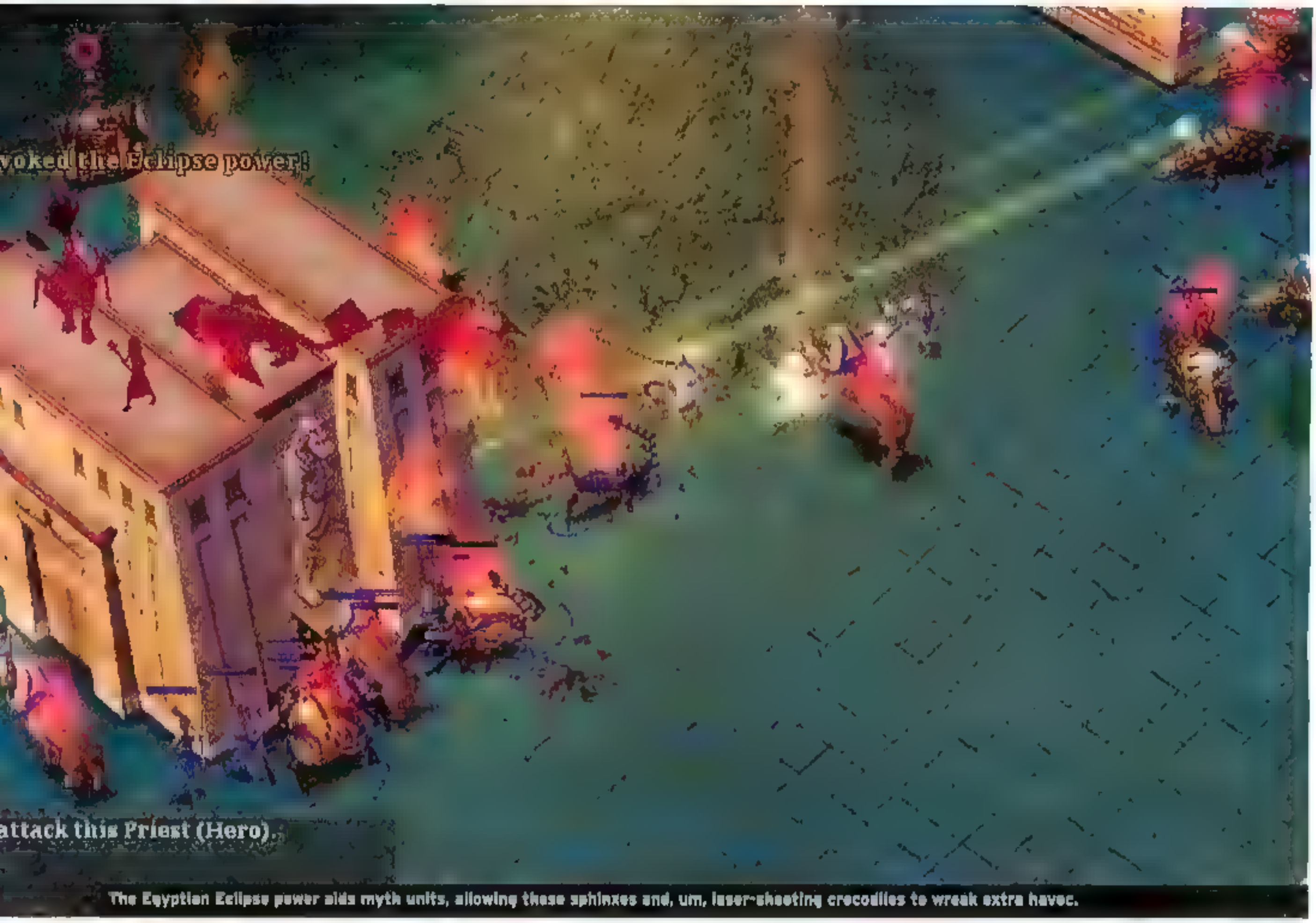
It ain't *UT*

The reality is, while *UT2003*'s levels are cool, they aren't even close to phenomenal. In fact, what these levels do best is provide a basis for changing them—specifically modding them—not spending all day romping through them. The inclusion of the *Unreal* editor leaves no doubt that the developers are leaving it up to the online community to take the reins and run to hell and back with it as they did with *UT*. Who wants to bet someone out there is already working on an Assault mode? Unfortunately, though, this decision for *UT2003* was made at the expense of innovation and ingenuity, which, minus community support, amounts to a visually amazing, dependable, but overall mediocre online first person shooter.

Still, after a long day of work, school or whatever else, FPS lovers will undoubtedly turn to *UT2003* for escapism. For others, the game will tide them over until the real fun begins with mods, skins, new maps, etc. And, of course, the *UT* diehards or prospective cyberathletes will swear by it no matter what: first as fans, second as athletes-in-training. But, all in all, *UT2003* could have been better. It's not about the questionable shift it makes into the sports world of *Maddens* and *2K* whatevers. It boils down to one thing for most folks: Is it fun? The answer: Yeah. But honestly, it's no *Unreal Tournament*.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

Gorgeous and polished up, but lacking revitalized gameplay.



The Egyptian Eclipse power aids myth units, allowing these sphinxes and, um, laser-shooting crocodiles to wreak extra havoc.

Age of Mythology

Ouch! I hit my thumb with the hammer of the gods! By **Robert Coffey**

PUBLISHER **Microsoft** DEVELOPER **Ensemble Studios** GENRE **Real-time strategy** URL **www.microsoft.com/games/ageofmythology** ESRB RATING **Teen; blood, violence** PRICE **$44.99**

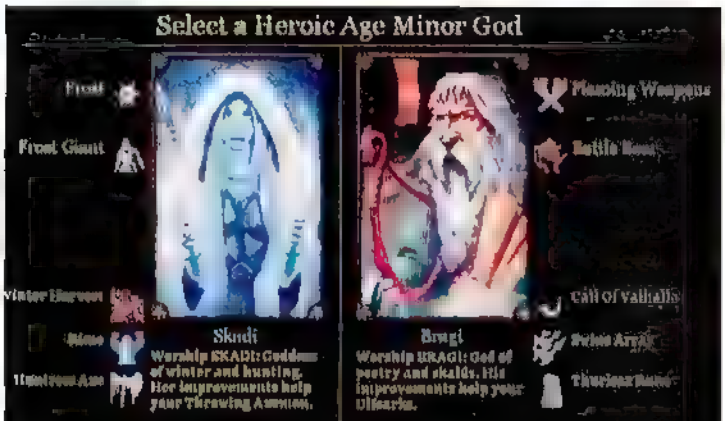
REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III, 256MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **LAN, Internet (2-12 players)**

You won't find a more polished, professional, accessible real-time strategy game than *Age of Mythology*. There's nothing not to like, nothing to really quibble about, nothing to get in the way of enjoying it—and nothing to convince you that the RTS game, the once-upon-a-time heartthrob of gaming, hasn't pretty much run out of gas and is living out its final days in the Entertainment Old Folks' Home in Barstow, chain smoking Camel straights and bitterly reminiscing to a drooling and unresponsive Mickey Rooney about how it was once the biggest stud in gaming. But if *Age of Mythology* is the last hurrah for this overly familiar genre, well, at least it's going out with a bang.

It's easy to find things to praise about *Age of Mythology*, since every good thing in this game finds some way to grab the spotlight while you play. Oh, you might think the graphics are nice and all, but once you first really get a look at a shoreline complete with shimmering waves lapping at the beach and sunken ships tangled in gently waving strands of seaweed, you'll be blown away by the game's artistry. And you might think that the auto formations are nice and all but once you watch a muscular wall of minotaurs brutally beat back a cavalry charge and protect the archers stationed behind them, you'll be grateful. And you'll be equally wowed with the nifty little hotkey banners that let you rapidly locate and direct both combat groups and idle villagers, and the way villagers are smart enough to start mining gold after building a mining camp, and the way the special abilities of the hero units trigger themselves and relieve you of a potentially painful layer of micromanagement. And when you realize that for the first time ever in an Ensemble game you aren't spending a third of your time rebuilding farms because HOORAY! FARMS NEVER DEPLETE!, well, you'll want to roll the game credits just so you can plant a big wet kiss of gratitude on the photos of the design team. For such a subtle and complex game, this is just about the most user friendly RTS I've ever played.

Keeping the faith

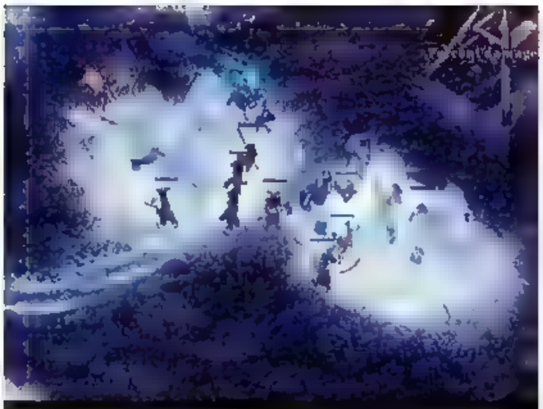
Instead of coughing up a baker's dozen of civilizations, each with one unique unit, as they did in *Age of Empires I* and *II*, Ensemble has pared the field down to just three factions: Greek, Egyptian, and Norse. Each side's unit set is unique—though admittedly, every side has some variation on the spearman, archer, catapult, cavalry, and so on. Each culture has some differences in the way they grow and build, but the primary difference comes in the form of gods



Worship SKADI: Goddess of winter and hunting. Her improvements help your Throwing Axemen.

Worship BRAGI: God of poetry and skalds. His improvements help your Ulfsarks.

Every age advance is accompanied by an opportunity to select a new god with unique units and powers.



While the Norse Frost Giants can do it on a one-on-one basis, the Frost god power will freeze huge amounts of enemy units at a time.

If this is the last hurrah for this overly familiar genre, well, at least it's going out with a bang.

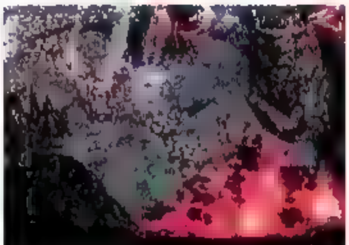
and myth units. This shift into the fantastic and magical is a huge departure for the heretofore historical *Age* franchise.

So while you still accumulate resources and build structures through four technological ages, you get the added bonus of selecting a new deity with every advance. And with this great responsibility comes great power.

The gods are all drawn from the pantheons of each of the three cultures. Depending on which deity you select, you are rewarded with special extra powerful myth units you can build at your temples, new technologies you can research, and extra-super-duper-special god powers that are basically one-shot spells you can trigger whenever you feel it most advantageous. The myth units are really expensive, especially since each requires the additional cost of Favor—a new fourth resource generated differently for each culture.

The god choices you make have a great impact on gameplay. Choose Hel over Tyr when playing the Norse and you'll be able to create legions of Fire, Frost, and Mountain Giants to pummel your foes instead of packs of less expensive Fenris Wolves or the terrible seafaring Jormund Brood. Choose Zeus so you can instantly kill one single foe at a crucial time with a Bolt from above, or select Hades to start the game with stone sentinels that protect your town center. Virtually every god power has an immediate and dramatic impact on the game, and it is primarily from these and the myth units that *Age of Mythology* generates its rich, unique flavor.

It's a flavor that carries over to the game's outstanding multiplayer mode.



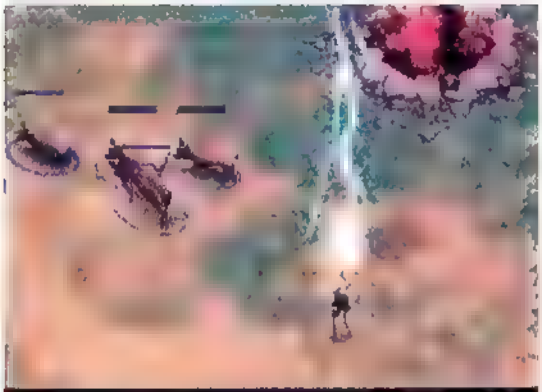
The lengthy single-player campaign even includes a few missions in Hades.

Yes, this is Ensemble's best single player campaign, as they promised, but it's still just a generic 'Stop evil guy from raising an ancient evil' plot. Where this game truly shines is when played against a friendly nemesis over a LAN or the Internet, and fans of the *Age of Empires* multiplayer games won't be disappointed here.

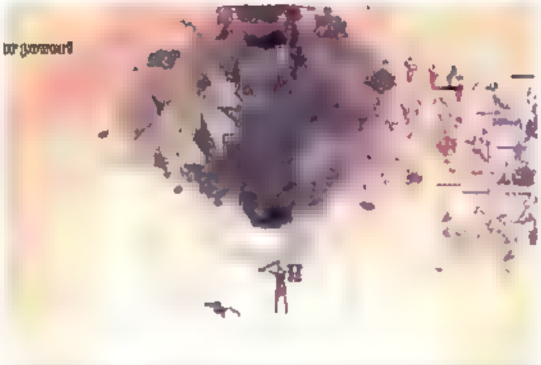
The tale of Sisyphus

Good A.I., a map editor, some great online tools, and a nifty skirmish mode help round out the features. It's a great package, and yet somehow, somewhere along the way all that mining and harvesting and gathering and building and fighting and rebuilding and fighting again began to feel like work to me. As a game model, the RTS has been done to death. It's been done well in several games (like the earlier *Age* games), and it's been done badly in way more, but that build/advance/attack thing just isn't fresh or all that compelling anymore. More than once in the course of playing I caught myself thinking, "I have to do this again?"

Ultimately, I'll be playing lots of *Age of Mythology* multiplayer, and I'll still enjoy the cool myth units and god powers, and I'll still marvel at the design and balance of the game. But deep in my heart, I'll still be waiting for something new to make me excited about RTS games again.



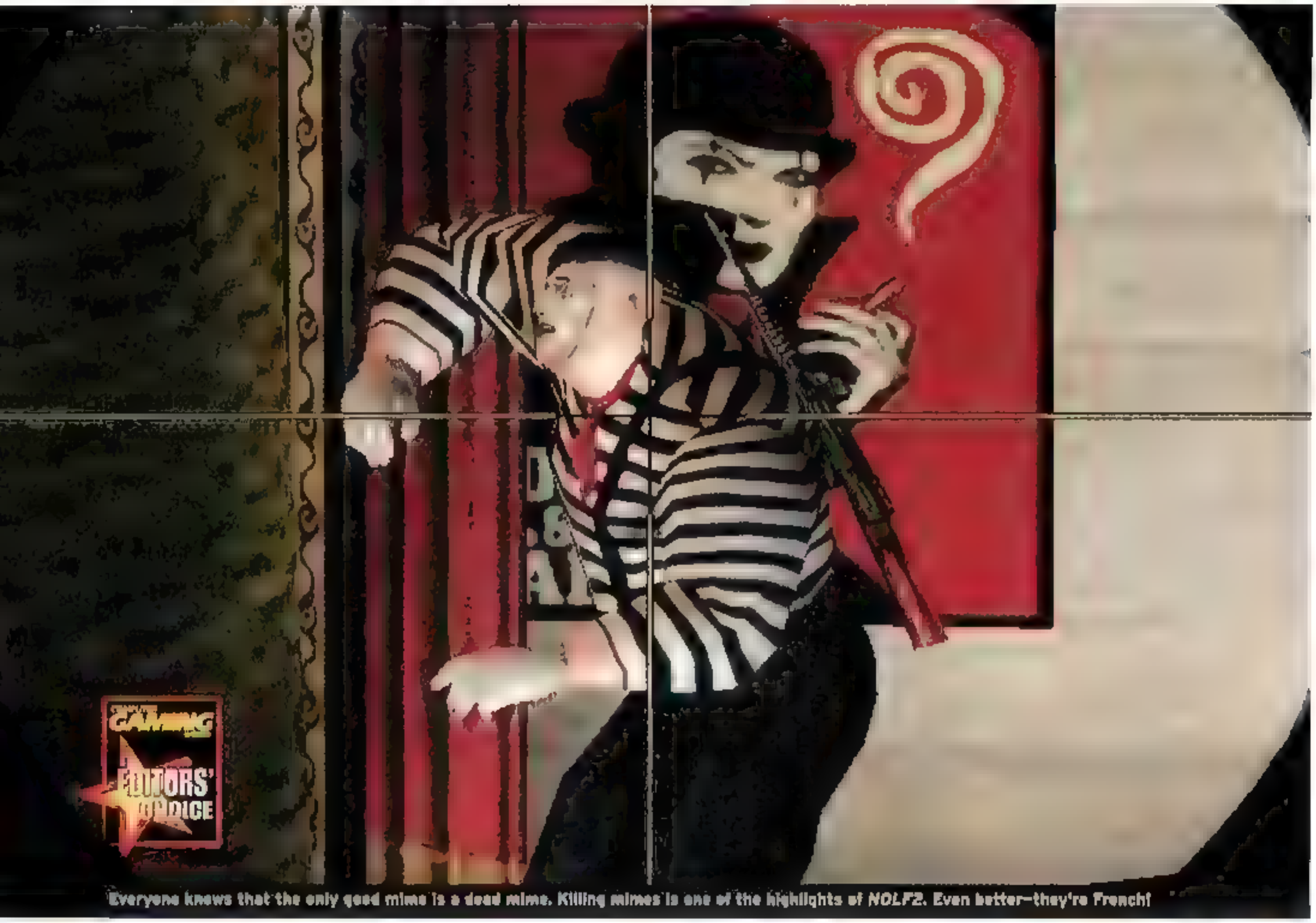
Straight from *The Odyssey*, you and your men are transformed into pigs, albeit swine that wield the mighty lightning bolt power of the gods!



Enemies got you down? Drop a few meteors on their heads and you'll feel better.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

Age of Mythology may well be the last RTS you'll ever need. Or even want, for that matter.



Everyone knows that the only good mime is a dead mime. Killing mimes is one of the highlights of *NOLF2*. Even better—they're French!

No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way

Kiss me, Cate **By Jeff Green**

PUBLISHER **Sierra** DEVELOPER **Monolith** GENRE **First-person shooter** URL **www.sierra.com/games/nolf2** ESRB RATING **Mature; blood, violence** PRICE **$44.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM (256MB for Windows XP), 1.2GB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 1.6GB hard drive space** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **LAN, Internet (2-4 players)**

If for nothing else, *No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way* will long be remembered as the computer game that finally let us indulge in a lifelong collective fantasy: killing French mimes. That makes *NOLF2* not just one of the best action games of 2002, but also a veritable public service. Someone alert the Nobel committee.

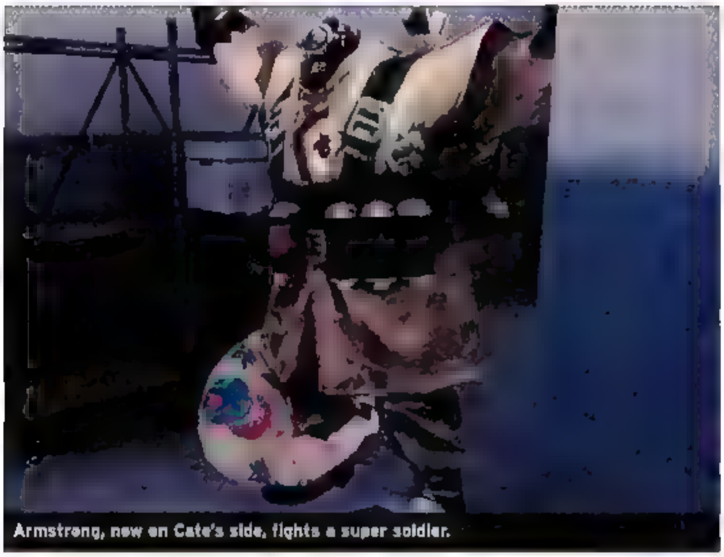
Evil French mimes are just one of the numerous highlights in this entertaining, funny, and mostly superior sequel to Monolith's surprising sleeper hit of 2000, which came out of nowhere and walked away with numerous awards including *CGW*'s Action Game of the Year. As in the original, you play superspy Cate Archer in a letter-perfect, loving spoof of 1960s British spy films complete with over-the-top villains, ridiculous gadgets, mod fashions, and swingin' music. Despite the high expectations that accompanied the sequel, *No One Lives Forever 2* delivers on almost every level and reaffirms Monolith's position as one of the smartest and most creative developers making games today.

Mo' better stealth

The new game picks up pretty much where the original ended, with UNITY agent Cate Archer once again assigned to thwart a sinister plot by evil bad guys H.A.R.M ("the leading experts in world domination," according to their corporate letterhead), while H.A.R.M., in turn, has hired a series of assassins to eliminate Archer for good. Over the course of 15 long, multipart chapters, Archer and a cast of welcome returning characters from the original hop around the globe—from Japan to Siberia to Antarctica to Akron, Ohio, and beyond—in a game that emphasizes stealth and caution over FPS gun blazing (though there's plenty of that, too).

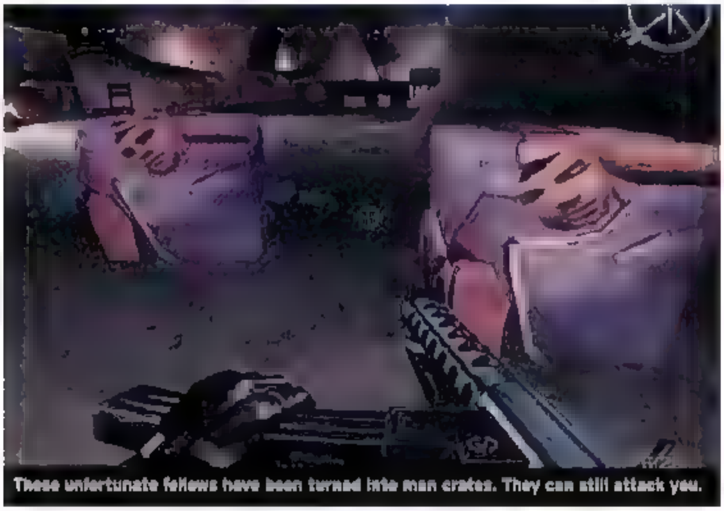
If you plug a bad guy who's near a wall, the bolt will spear him to the wall. You can then take the bolt back and watch his body crumple to the ground. Yay!

Monolith obviously listened to their fans and critics, and eliminated or fixed all the annoying problems of the first game while leaving the cool parts intact. For one thing, you actually get to play this game more than watch it: the original's seemingly endless (though often hilarious) cut scenes have been

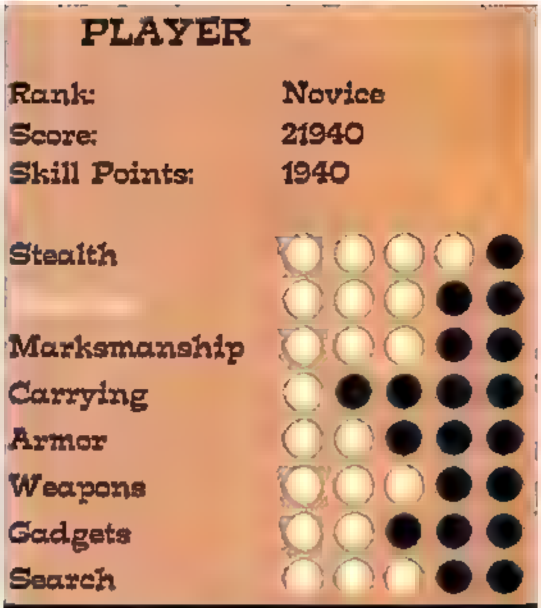


Armstrong, now on Cate's side, fights a super soldier.

What really sets *No One Lives Forever 2* apart is the game's sheer polish and professionalism.



These unfortunate fellows have been turned into man crates. They can still attack you.



PLAYER

Rank: Novice
Score: 21940
Skill Points: 1940

Stealth	○○○○●
	○○○●●
Marksmanship	○○○●●
Carrying	○●●●●
Armor	○○●●●
Weapons	○○○●●
Gadgets	○○●●●
Search	○○○●●

You're rewarded for completed missions with points that you can apply RPG-style to your character, upgrading stats like marksmanship, which improves your aim, or search, which speeds up the time it takes you to search a body or object.

replaced by far quicker, more effective scenes that get in and out and hand control over to you immediately.

Also revamped, thank God, are the aggravating enemy alarms and security cameras, which, in the original, would trigger if you were spotted and then stay on forever, basically forcing you into a level restart. Alarms are still present in *NOLF2*, but are much more forgiving. Enemies will still swarm on you in a higher state of awareness, but now, if you can remain hidden, they'll give up and the alarm will deactivate.

In addition, if spotted, you can stop or slow down pursuing enemies with two hilariously implemented nonlethal weapons—the bear trap and the banana—and you can seek out hiding places, scattered throughout each level, that will render you invisible to all pursuers. If anything, Monolith overcompensated here and made it almost too easy now. Though the enemy A.I. is still mostly outstanding—especially when engaged in battle—it's disappointing and unrealistic to watch enemies chase you into a sealed dead end and then suddenly give up because you found a hiding place.

The level design encourages stealth, usually offering more than one way to reach any given target. Unfortunately, the early Japan and Siberia levels are probably the most mundane, with too much backtracking over the same territory. But as the game progresses, the design gets more inspired, with a couple of truly great set pieces (the tornado in Ohio and the "rail shooter" in India) that rival the best parts of the original.

James Bond meets Dilbert

What really sets *NOLF2* apart is the game's polish and professionalism. Monolith's new Jupiter engine offers beautifully detailed graphics, and the animation throughout is amazing, with realistic eye, limb, and head movements that are far less robotic than those of most 3D game characters. Which is a fancy game-critic way of saying that Cate Archer is frighteningly hot this time around.

NOLF2's dialogue and voice acting are outstanding and hilarious, and are, once again, the real highlight of the game. Someone on the *NOLF* team obviously spent formative years in a Dilbert-style corporate environment; the absurd overheard conversations, found documents, and motivational messages that litter the woefully bureaucratic H.A.R.M organization are dead-on and painfully funny. You'll find yourself waiting to kill enemies because you want to hear their ridiculous conversations first.

If *NOLF2* doesn't quite feel like a grand slam, it's only because the first game set expectations so high. But don't let that cloud the big picture. This is a great game by any measure, and it goes on the short list with *Medal of Honor* and *Jedi Knight II* as one of the best shooters of the year.

VERDICT

As funny and stylish as the original, and more fun to play, too.

Prisoner of War

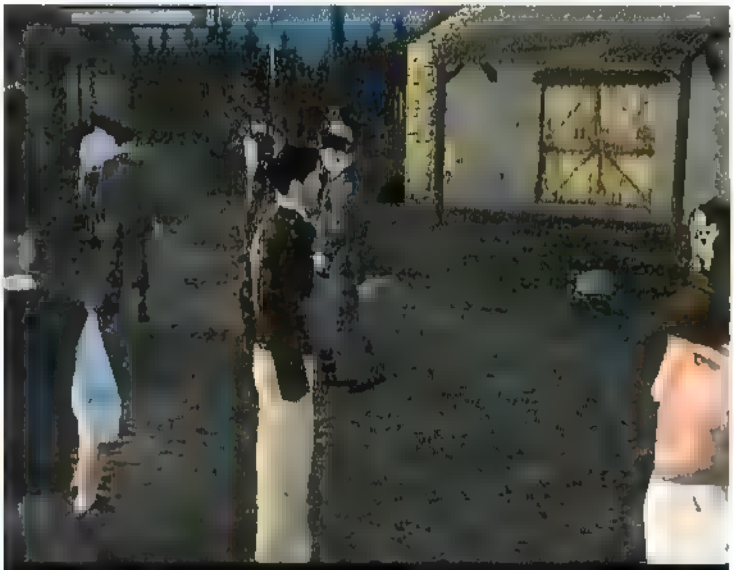
This is no *Great Escape* **By Thomas L. McDonald**

PUBLISHER **Codemasters** DEVELOPER **Wide Games** GENRE **Adventure** URL **www.codemasters.com** ESRB RATING **Teen; mild violence** PRICE **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, 16MB graphics card** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **None**

Have you ever paused while playing *Metal Gear Solid* and thought how much better it would be if they took out all the weapons and excitement and plot and style, and just left the pure unadulterated, sublime art of sneaking around? I bet you have—you just won't admit it. Well, the folks at Wide Games have got your number, boy-o. They made *Prisoner of War* for those silent masses yearning for a game chock full of the parts most people like to skip.

Stealth missions always seem to be flown in special-delivery fresh and steaming from the very bowels of hell just in time to drag a decent shooter to a screeching halt. I'm not talking about a game like *Thief*, where you use a combination of stealth, skill, and combat, and actually have weapons. I'm talking about games where the main goal is to avoid those enemy view cones that trigger automatic detection and mission failure. *Prisoner of War* doesn't just have these sequences. *Prisoner of War* is nothing *but* those sequences, repeated with variation. It's Philip Glass' minimalism applied to game design.



The game runs through accelerated days, each scheduled with specific events and marked by changes of day to night.

It's like some kind of demented, Teutonic *Groundhog Day*, where you wind up back in prison every time you escape.

Worse, *POW* sets this nonaction in a horrible mish-mash of WWII clichés presented with almost comical disregard for reality. The characters are a side-splitting array of stereotypes. I expected every German soldier to roll his eyes up and say, "I know NUTH-ink!" in his best Sergeant Schultz accent, while one Irish prisoner seems to have wandered over from a Lucky Charms commercial. The first prison has exactly three prisoners and about a battalion of German soldiers to guard them.

I say "first prison" because, like some kind of demented, Teutonic *Groundhog Day*, you wind up back in prison every time you escape. The holding camp, Luft, Colditz, Luft (again), and Colditz (again!) make up the five main missions, each comprised of a series of objectives. The prisons get bigger (with both repeated locations heavily modified), and the guards more numerous, but the game play essentials remain the same. You have to perform a series of tasks inside the prison (steal objects, sabotage, find keys), culminating in your escape and subsequent capture.

Each day in the game progresses through an accelerated schedule of activities: roll call, breakfast, exercise, and so on. Guards patrol in patterns, and some can be bribed. It gives the game a more free-range feel, but it doesn't change the fact that eventually, you'll have to sneak from point A to point B, steal object C, and return without being caught and without an effective save system. Making this all the more difficult is a control system that actually gave me hand cramps. Though the game is played from a third-person view, you look around in the first person view. You can't, however, move or interact in first person, which is a problem for a game based entirely on your ability to see threats and avoid detection.

This is as good as it gets: climbing. Man, gimme a game with lots of climbing. And waiting. And no weapons.

In case you're still wondering: No, you never, ever get a weapon. All you do is creep around avoiding conflict. This is supposed to be suspenseful. It's not. It's tedious. *POW* amplifies the failings of *Metal Gear Solid* while offering none of its redeeming strengths.

There was a brief moment when I thought *POW* might be like *Great Escape* meets *Flashpoint*. That moment lasted from when I saw the pictures on the box until I met this guy.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆

We hoped for an interactive *Great Escape*, but the controls and sluggish pacing make this *Hogan's Heroes* without the laughs.

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Violence
Blood

Ghost Recon: Island Thunder

Cuba Libre! **By Raphael Liberatore**

PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER Red Storm Entertainment
GENRE Tactical simulation
URL www.redstorm.com
ESRB RATING Mature; blood and gore, violence
PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D card
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 600
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT Internet, LAN (2-36 players)

Ghost Recon: Island Thunder is a great expansion, packed with plenty of goodies and enhancements that make the first *Ghost Recon* the standout it should have been.

Island Thunder takes place on Cuba where a fledgling democratic regime is about to hold free elections for the first time. However, a subversive group of communist rebels are about to gain control of elections through violence and revolution. It's up to the Ghosts, a crack team of U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers (aka Green Berets), to ensure that democracy prevails in eight action-packed missions. Red Storm presents a range of no-holds-barred operations: rescuing downed Marine chopper pilots hiding in windy mountain crevices, protecting voters from rebel attacks, assaulting an enemy convoy along the beach, and blowing ammo dumps in foul weather. Some missions are timed, and as usual, all offer multiple objectives.

The MM-1 auto grenade launcher is a new addition to an already kick-ass arsenal.

Smarter A.I. makes for some of the best firefights in any Red Storm game to date.

One thing slaps you across the face right from the get-go: The enemy A.I. is smarter and better armed. Rebels are relentless and tend to throw everything at you in wave after wave of brutal assaults, making for some of the best firefights in any Red Storm game to date.

It helps that Red Storm buffed out the U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers—something *Ghost Recon* and *Desert Siege* seriously lacked. Each campaign begins with every commando possessing five extra combat points to add to any of the weapon, stealth, endurance, and leadership skills. Also, more kit options are available. New weapons include the current-issue M4 SOCCOM rifle, the AK 74 rifle, M240G and RP 46 machine guns, Z84 submachine gun, MM1 grenade launcher, SR25 sniper rifle, a couple of 9mm pistols, and more. They nicely supplement *Ghost Recon*'s already-packed arsenal. Binoculars have been upgraded with better optics, which include a range finder. Likewise, the increased skill level of specialists makes unlocking and using them finally worthwhile.

Red Storm also developed *Island Thunder* with some nifty tweaks for enhanced gameplay. Sounds and weather effects add to an already realistic atmosphere, while accessing the command map doesn't force action to momentarily freeze. The quick mission feature not only allows access to all kits and specialists, but also provides an additional game type called Defend, where your team must hold back an enemy onslaught at a predetermined location. It's a blast.

And, what would a Red Storm tactical shooter expansion be without adding more multiplayer support? Five new maps have been added, along with three more game types: Defend, Cat and Mouse, and Behemoth. The acid test, however, came when I gathered a few of my Special Forces buddies (two just back from overseas) for a rousing session of *Island Thunder* multiplayer. We were all impressed with the way weather effects added another tense layer to an already challenging game, and the way the A.I. sent waves of enemies at us to keep us on our toes. Interestingly, everyone gradually shifted away from their normal weapon selection—usually the OICW—to the new weapons. The M4 SOCCOM is our new favorite.

The cynic might label *Island Thunder* as just more of same. But with eight new missions, tons of enhancements, and a refined multiplayer experience, Red Storm has delivered another worthwhile game.

Wind, morning haze, and rain add another element to the already tense environments. The weather effects are among the best in any game.

Summer's here and the time is right for fighting in the street.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Another top-notch mission pack for *Ghost Recon* makes a good game into an outstanding one.

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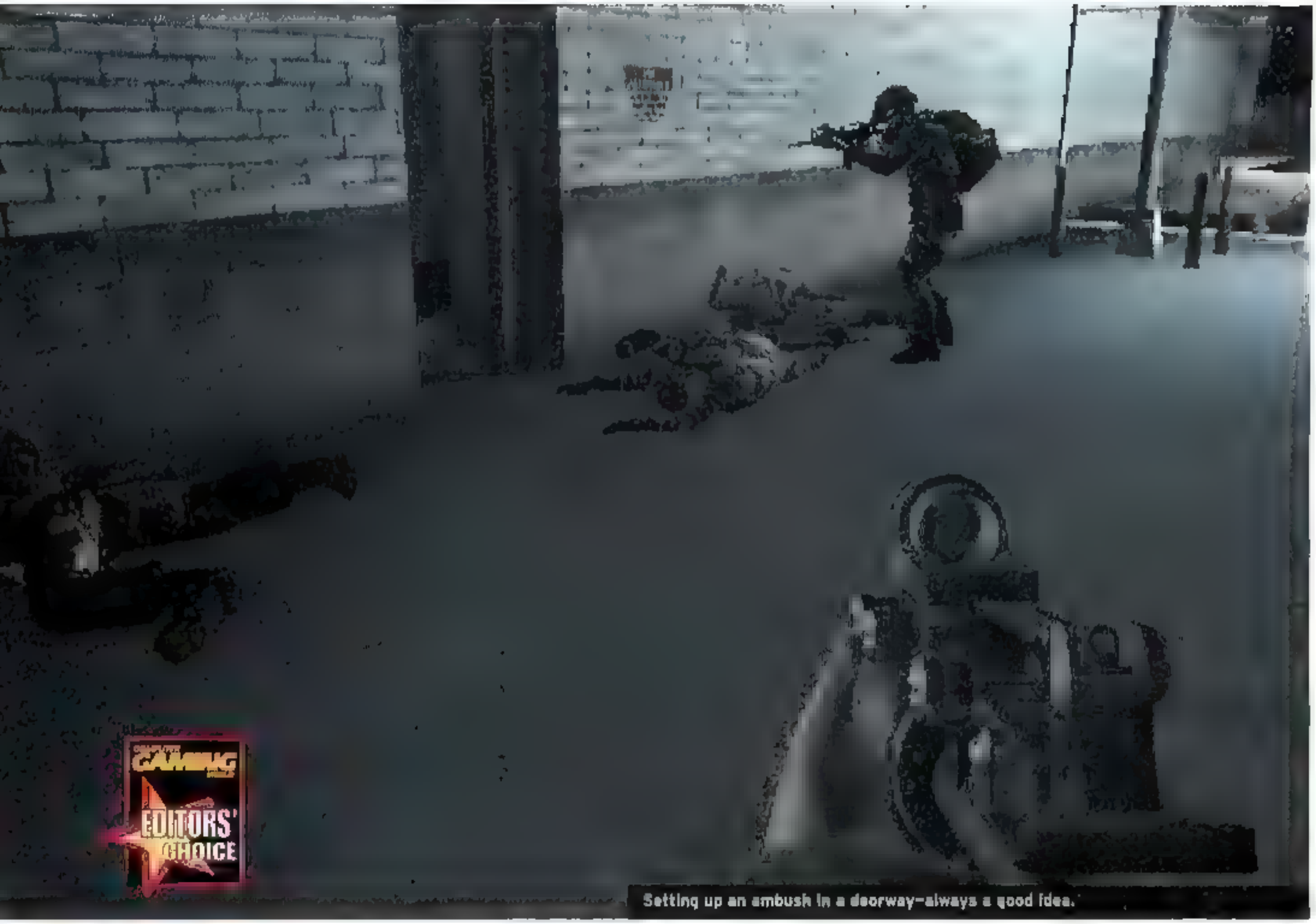


Setting up an ambush in a doorway—always a good idea.

America's Army: Operations

Recruiting enters the 21st century **By Raphael Liberatore**

PUBLISHER **U.S. Army**
DEVELOPER **U.S. Army**
GENRE **Tactical Shooter**
URL **www.goarmy.com**
ESRB RATING **Mature; blood and gore, violence**
PRICE **Free**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 766, 128MB RAM, DirectX 8.1, 32MB 3D card, 600MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium 4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, 64MB 3D graphics card**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **Internet, LAN (2-20 players)**

How can Uncle Sam hope to transform today's sedentary youth into tomorrow's soldiers? By tasking them where they live—at their computer. *America's Army: Operations* is a top-notch tactical shooter that gives players realistic insight into the world of the U.S. Army soldier, and you don't have to sign on the dotted line to score your copy. In fact, you don't even have to open your wallet: This game is free. But beware of strangers bearing gifts. Once you've experienced the thrill of soldiering at your computer screen, you just might get an itch to try it for real. At least, that's what the U.S. Army is banking on.

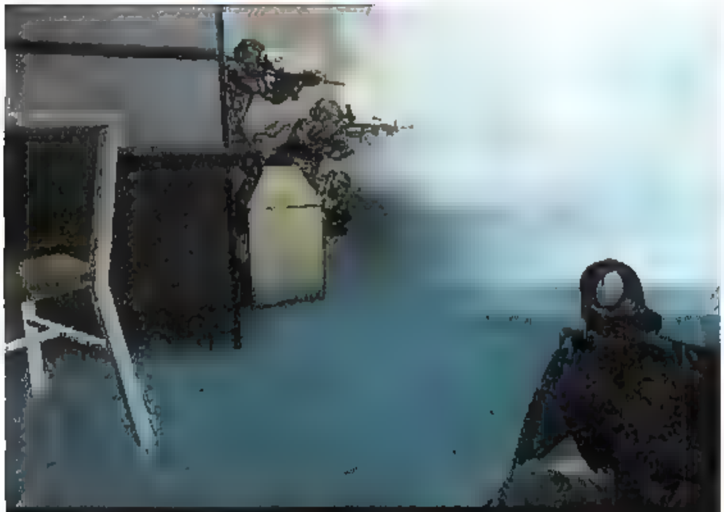
Created and developed by Department of Defense personnel, *America's Army: Operations* is a solid tactical simulation. The game is based on U.S. Army infantry doctrine and tactics, where individual skills are honed and combined to enhance the performance of the overall team. For those interested in pursuing an Army career, *America's Army* provides a glimpse of soldiering and teamwork. But is it really representative of what a new recruit faces when he turns in jeans for army greens?

An army of one

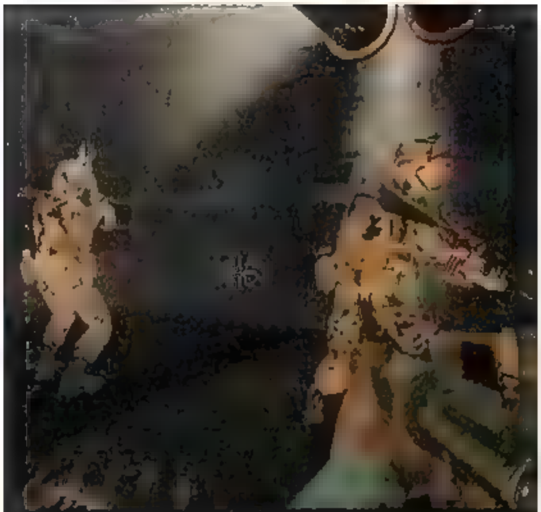
The game begins with a series of tutorials modeled after real basic training and infantry school, where soldiers methodically progress through each task before graduating to the next school. Players may continue to pursue more specific infantry training, leading to the achievement of airborne, ranger, and sniper status.

A drill sergeant instructs players how to use the M16A2 rifle and negotiate an obstacle course in order to understand the mechanics of the game. Unlike the real world, however, these guys don't resort to psychological torture to bend you to their ways. Rather, they're almost parental in their approach. But the METT (Mission, Enemy, Troops, and Time) training techniques are realistic. Playing the range qualification course brought back personal memories of the excitement of shooting pop-up targets during M-16 qualification, which was a blast in basic. Nab 36 out of 40 targets and you qualify for sniper school, where you may use the M-24 sniper rifle or the M-82 behemoth sniper rifles. But mess up and get below the minimum 23 hits needed to pass the course, and you've got to requalify in order to advance to the next level.

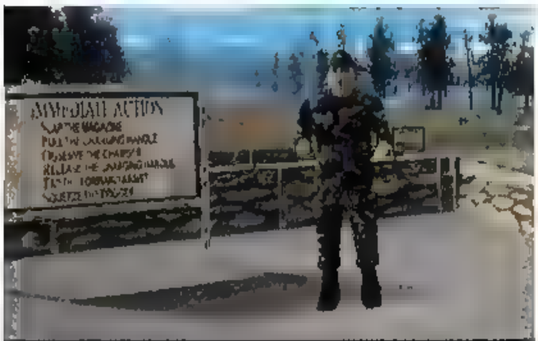
After players qualify with the M16A2, pass the obstacle course, and complete the weapons familiarization course at Fort Benning, they conduct force-on-force training missions with other players using MILES (laser simulation) gear. These missions vary in terrain and



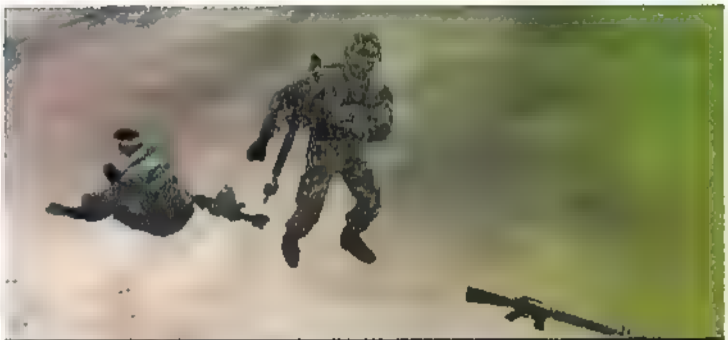
America's Army captures the tactical aspects of old school *Counter-Strike*, where teamwork—and flashbangs—are king.



When it comes to close-quarters battles, the Army wrote the book. Now you get to read it.



YES, drill sergeant!



With our prisoner captured, a teammate drops a smoke grenade to signal Airborne.

Playing the range qualification course brought back personal memories of the excitement of shooting pop-up targets during M-16 qualification, which was a blast in basic.

scope, and include defending Alaskan pipelines, rescuing POWs, completing joint readiness exercises and McKenna MOUT site training, and patrolling and learning ambushing techniques in the mountains. If they pass muster, players are ready to shed their MILES gear and showcase their newfound skills by joining their comrades in the world of online battle.

Uncle Sam's rules

Thanks to Epic's *Unreal* engine, graphics look polished and detailed—and the game sounds even better. In fact, weapon sounds are so real, you can almost feel the slight recoil of the M-16A2 rifle or the impact from the M-203 grenade launcher. Maps are detailed and varied.

Just so you understand the rules, the Army instituted a penalty system for rules of engagement (ROE) violations or conduct unbecoming a soldier. If you violate ROE, you'll find yourself thrown into the brig at Fort Leavenworth, or even suspended from the game altogether—a gaming version of dishonorable discharge. In some respects, the game has a simpler format than other tactical shooters, like *Ghost Recon* or *Operation Flashpoint*. However, it does offer real-world features not found in other games, like hand signals. You'll need a fast computer to play *America's Army*, because system specs are steep.

All in all, *America's Army: Operations* is a solid addition to the tactical simulation genre. It remains to be seen whether it's a public relations exercise that will lead to droves of new recruits.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

The U.S. Army gets into the gaming biz with a quality tactical shooter.

A CORRESPONDENCE COURSE IN BASIC

America's Army does a fine job re-creating the tasking atmosphere of the U.S. Army's nine-week indoctrination course, known as basic training, as well as that of a number of Army infantry schools. While running through the training courses, I almost felt as though I'd just stepped off the bus at Fort Benning—except that I didn't have to shave my head to play. The rifle marksmanship, weapons familiarization, and obstacle courses are close to the real thing with two major exceptions: They're shorter, and they're less stressful because you don't have drill sergeants breathing down your neck. The training itself is appropriately challenging and competitive. The first time I hit 36 out of 40 pop-up targets to earn my expert badge was the highlight of my own basic training, and it was a hoot reliving it on the computer. *America's Army* is built around authentic army combat techniques—there's no better way to see how the Army does it, other than doing it for real.

RollerCoaster Tycoon 2

Not quite a thrill ride **By Dana Jongewaard**

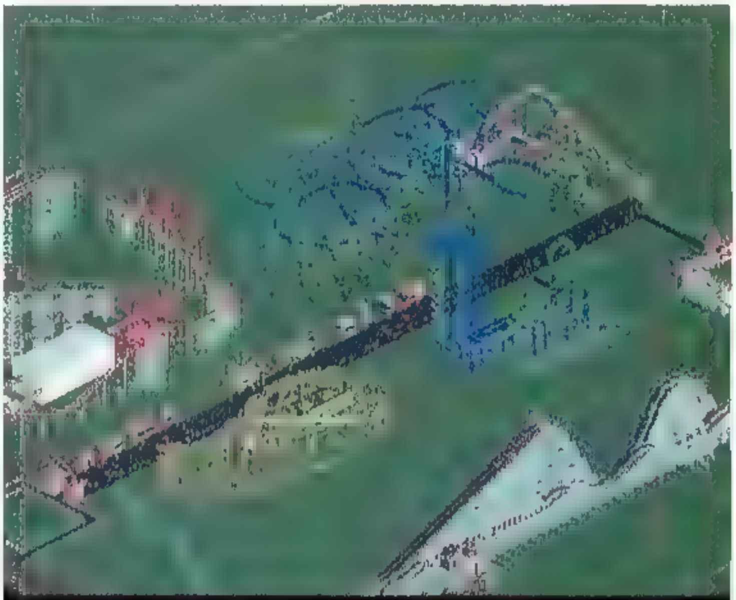
PUBLISHER: **Infogrames**
DEVELOPER: **Chris Sawyer**
GENRE: **Business simulation**
[illegible] **.rollercoastertycoon2.com**
ESRB RATING: **Everyone**
PRICE: **$29.99**

REQUIREMENTS: **Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 120MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **128MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **None**

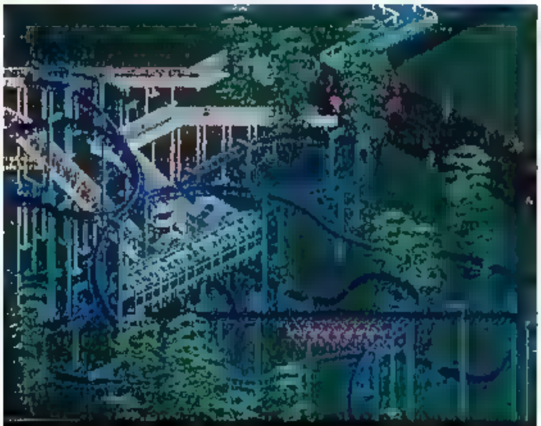
Back in 1999, Chris Sawyer found a publisher for the game he developed in his home, *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, which started a barrage of clones both good and bad. It led to such highs as *SimGolf* and *Monopoly Tycoon*, and such lows as *Hotel Giant: Maximum Capacity* and *Mall Tycoon*. *RCT* sold millions of copies and made millions of dollars and was the gaming world's equivalent of *The Blair Witch Project*. A success of this magnitude inevitably leads to a sequel. Sequels, however, can be a dicey enterprise—sometimes you get a *Godfather II*, but more often, it's a *Blair Witch Project 2*.

As with its predecessor, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* was developed solely by Chris Sawyer. The big changes in this follow-up are the addition of Six Flags coasters and theme parks, the roller coaster designing tool, and a scenario editor. The Six Flags rides are fun for their complexity and grandiosity, but if you haven't actually been to the individual parks (Six Flags Belgium, anyone?), the franchise items aren't going to be any more meaningful than any non-licensed park or roller coaster.

The real fun comes from the other new features. Being able to design your own roller coasters outside the financial restrictions of your park is really enjoyable, and you can save these coasters for later use. With the scenario editor, you can build scenarios to your specifications, although it's not possible to create in a pure sandbox mode—the game requires you to have some goal for the park, although you can remove the restriction of money. The *RCT2* website also features downloadable scenarios and roller coasters created by other contributors, increasing the replay value of the game.


Welcome to Cartmanland, a theme park chock-full of food stands and vomit-inducing roller coasters.

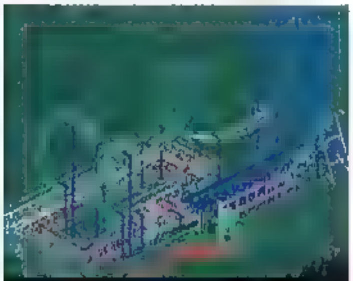
Being able to design your own roller coasters outside the financial restrictions of your park is really enjoyable.


Hey honey, it's raining and there's lightning! Let's ride on metal rails high up in the air!

As for the rest of *RCT2*, it's pretty similar to its predecessor, except there's more of it. The parks are bigger, and there are a lot more rides, food stands, and scenery types to choose from.

The graphics, interface, and tool set are also the same as the last time around, and it's here that I was most disappointed in *RCT2*. Updating the look of a game and fixing problematic elements is a key distinction between a new version of a game and merely another expansion pack. A shift from 2D to 3D would have been a great way to showcase these new coasters. Also, consistent back buttons for the interface would save a lot of time that's spent closing and reopening windows. However, the most frustrating aspect is the tool set. Many of the tools in the first game were clunky and difficult to use, and not much has changed in this edition. The land elevation tool, for example, is still hard to control, and as you try to get the land at the correct angle for your ride, you get charged $20 each time a corner of the square flexes up or down, wasting lots of your money.

Ultimately, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* is a good game, if not ground-breaking like the original. If you were a fan of *RCT*, or if you hadn't ever checked it out but were interested in seeing what the fuss was about, go and pick up a copy. But know that you'll get much the same experience at a lower price by plucking the older game from the bargain bin.


Real-life rides from Six Flags parks, like the Deja Vu, can be put in your theme park.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Not the sweeping success of the original, but still more ups than downs.

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Stronghold: Crusader

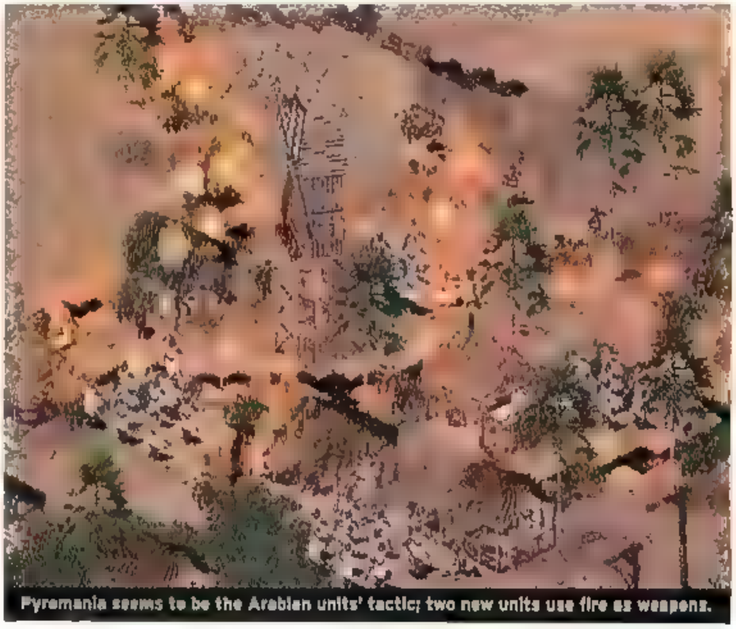
Building castles in the sand **By Di Luo**

PUBLISHER **Gathering of Developers**
DEVELOPER **Firefly Studios**
GENRE **Real-time strategy**
URL **stronghold.godgames.com/Crusader**
ESRB RATING **Teen; blood, violence** PRICE **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space, 4MB videocard**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **Internet, LAN (2-8 players)**

The hardest games to write about are the mediocre ones; you can't slam them and you can't praise them. *Stronghold: Crusader* has the dubious honor of being such a title. *Crusader* is the sequel to *Stronghold*, a game that added a twist of castle building and a dash of detailed economics to the traditional RTS. While the original was a breath of fresh air in a market deluged with copycats, the sequel feels like a poorly done expansion pack.

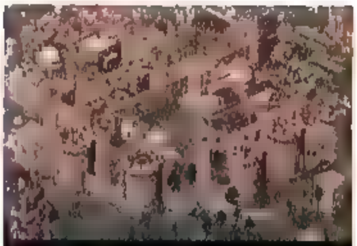
As the name implies, *Crusader* is based on the wars between the Christian and Muslim states over the control of the Holy Lands. Four "historical" campaigns are included. Though *Crusader* borrows names and places from history, it makes *Rambo* look like the epitome of historical accuracy. Three campaigns focus on the Christian armies and usually consist of building up a castle and defending it against endless Arabian hordes. In addition to the campaigns, the Crusader Trail features 50 linked skirmish missions in which both the user and the A.I. factions have fully working castles to duel over the possession of each map.



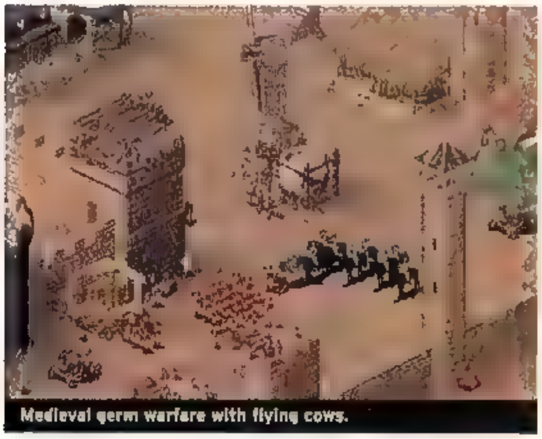
Pyromania seems to be the Arabian units' tactic; two new units use fire as weapons.

Though *Crusader* borrows names and places from history, it makes *Rambo* look like the epitome of historical accuracy.

The Arabs are the most disappointing addition to the game. Instead of a fully realized faction, they're window dressing. In Skirmish and Multiplayer modes, the Arabs are purchased through a mercenary camp. You can't play an Arabian lord, and all the Arabian castles are remarkably western, inhabited by cathedrals, priests, and pale-skinned ladies in flowery dresses. Except for the horse archers and the wall-scaling assassins, their units are Europeans with turbans. The artificiality of the Arabians is embodied by their engineers, who respond to your commands with bad Scottish accents that miraculously switch to Arabic when they man their magical language-bestowing machines. The Arabian campaign has no economic play and is made up of five puzzle-like scenarios. With this emphasis on combat over economics, much of the charm of the original disappears, and *Crusader* seems more like an average RTS.



Castles and economies can get quite complicated in multiplayer games and the more difficult scenarios.



Medieval germ warfare with flying cows.

Compounding the game's troubles is *Crusader*'s inability to fix the problems of its predecessor. Troop control is less than ideal. You can't order missile units to attack anyone out of range, forcing you to keep your cursor hovering over approaching enemies until they're in range. Rotating or zooming out of the map with the mouse is awkward, and certain spots on the map are difficult to see no matter which way the map is rotated. Dismantling your own buildings is still impossible unless you order troops to attack them, and industries can't be turned off individually.

Still, a bad expansion can't completely destroy a good game. A few of the scenarios are still interesting, and the charm of the original shines through at times. The one good addition is the expanded multiplayer mode. You can now play the skirmish mode on a host of different maps designed for 2-8 players. While map selection is good, a few different game modes and more distinct factions would have been nice.

Despite its many faults, *Crusader* isn't bad enough to be coaster material. Those seeking a better version of *Stronghold* for multiplayer should give it a go, but the price tag isn't worth it for solitary gamers.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Another expansion pack billed as a sequel that charges too much for too little.

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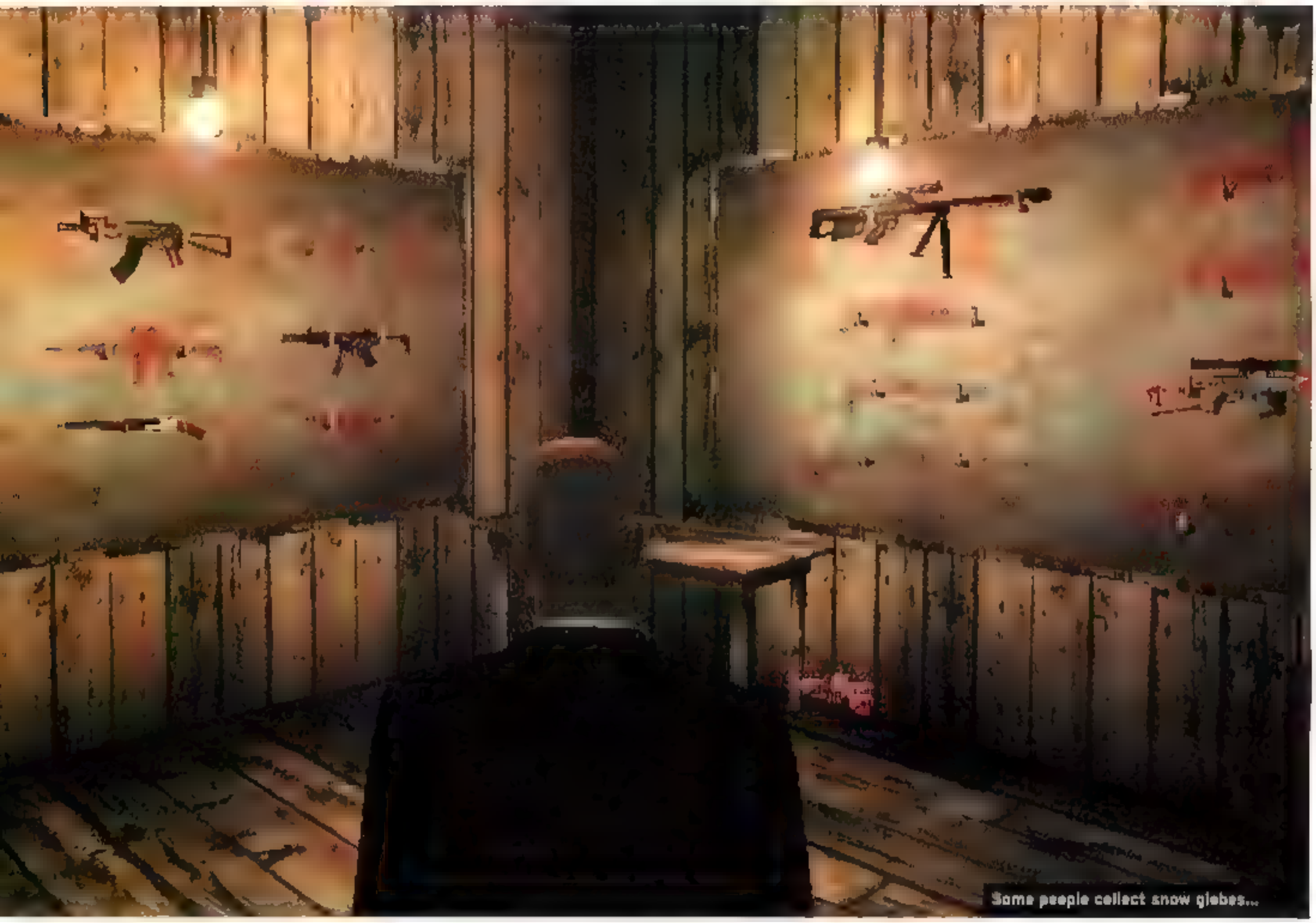


Some people collect snow globes...

Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

The bald, brooding one returns in a superior sequel **By Ron Dulin**

PUBLISHER **Eidos Interactive**
DEVELOPER **Io Interactive**
GENRE **Action**
URL **www.eidosinteractive.com**
ESRB RATING **Mature; blood, strong sexual content, violence**
PRICE **$49.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **None**

A good game was buried somewhere deep inside *Hitman: Codename 47*, but you had to dig past a terrible interface to find it. And it wasn't just the interface. The original *Hitman* had so many problems, it was easy to ignore its excellent environments and great premise. Give Io Interactive credit for learning from its mistakes. Almost every flaw has been fixed for *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*, and the result is a nearly perfect blend of action and stealth.

As in the original, you play the genetically-engineered assassin known only as 47, a black-suited, brooding Yul Brynner lookalike. At the outset of the game, 47 has forsaken his life as an assassin-for-hire to work as the groundskeeper at a Sicilian church. When his friend and employer, Father Vittorio, is kidnapped, 47 is forced back into action to save the priest.

Silent assassin

The missions require you to infiltrate an area and assassinate your target, but there are occasionally secondary objectives. With only a few exceptions, the missions aren't linear. You can choose to sneak around undetected or just run in with guns blazing, and each mission will rate you on both your stealth and aggression levels. You're encouraged to be stealthy and are awarded bonuses when you kill the target and get out without being detected or hurting anyone else. Strangely, these bonuses are weapons—including a sawed-off shotgun—which aren't very useful to the stealthy assassin.

There are usually several options for sneaking through an area. In one mission, you must assassinate a computer hacker barricaded in the basement of Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers. There are several options for getting to the basement: You can knock out a pizza-delivery boy and take his uniform, or you can set off the fire alarms and make your way down with the firemen. A few missions will give you just one possible stealth route; these, often set in wide open spaces, are tricky to sneak through.

Luckily, there's plenty of feedback about what's going on around you. The game tells you when a body has been discovered, what the guards are looking for, and when key events are taking place. The excellent map also provides help by showing important areas and the locations of guards—including the directions they're facing.

Stealthy playing requires a fair amount of patience, and you'd spend a good deal of your time hiding, waiting for a safe route to your next hiding place. But the waiting only adds to the tension. The A.I. is believable, and if anyone gets a decent

You'll need to hide corpses if you don't want to get caught.

Your target is hiding under the water.

They don't call it *Hitman* for nothing.

look at you—especially in foreign countries—your cover will be blown. Likewise, just killing everybody can be tricky; not only are you severely outnumbered, but there's no way to replenish your health during missions, so a few hits will easily kill you.

The save system adds to the suspense. You're given a limited number of saves per mission, and you'll occasionally earn bonus saves as you complete various objectives. You'll need to be thrifty with your saves, but in most cases, you'll have more than enough to complete your objectives and get to safety. And, unlike in the original, the interface is based on the WASD control scheme that's standard in action games.

IO Interactive has fixed almost every flaw for *Hitman 2*; the result is an almost perfect blend of action and stealth.

Not-so-silent assassin

For the aggressive player, there are dozens of weapons available. You can't take them all on a mission, however, and *Hitman 2* requires you to choose the right tool for the job. You're not allowed to carry more than one rifle, so if you want sniping abilities, you'll have to sacrifice the quick firepower of a submachine gun. There are also sneakier weapons, such as a wire garrote and a crossbow for silent sniping. Unfortunately, there's no means of tranquilizing an opponent from long range.

The feedback system gives you vital information, such as guards finding dead ninjas.

Hitman 2 gives you so many options that it's hard not to notice the things you can't do. You can't lie prone, which would come in very handy in a few missions. Nor can you climb over walls or obstacles, except in very limited areas, which can be frustrating.

These are minor criticisms for a game that, otherwise, is great in every respect. The missions are continually engaging, taking you from Russia to the Middle East to Japan. Each of the diverse locations looks great, and the score is one of those rare game soundtracks that actually adds to the mood. There are even some legitimately funny moments in a game that is otherwise overwhelmingly serious, such as the Malaysian guards yelling "Hey, baddy!" when they spot you.

All in all, *Hitman 2* is well executed in every respect.

VERDICT ★★★★½

An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth.

Links 2003

The king of golf sims gets a new swing **By Jeff Lackey**

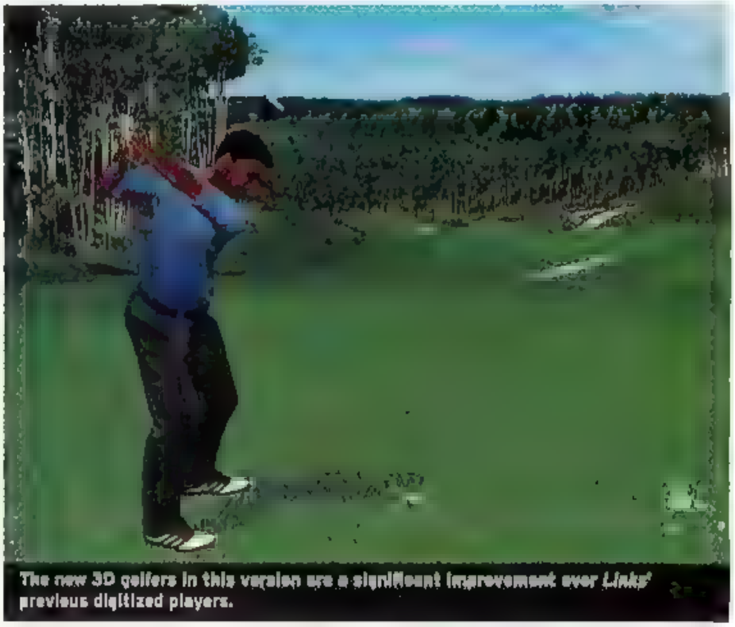
PUBLISHER **Microsoft**
DEVELOPER **Microsoft**
GENRE **Sports**
URL **www.microsoft.com/games/links2003**
ESRB RATING **Everyone**
PRICE **$54.95**

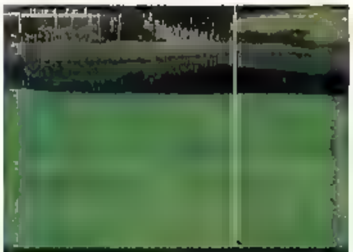
REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM (128MB minimum for WIN 2K/XP), 390MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D graphics card**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **None**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **Internet, LAN**

While the state of the art in most of PC gaming is all about faster louder sweat and heart palpitation-inducing action, *Links* has reigned as the king of the golf sims by being solid, featuring good graphics, realistic ball physics, superb multiplayer capabilities, an abundance of game modes, and very few bugs. While other golf sims would break new ground with innovations like course designers and real-time mouse swings, *Links* would get around to doing these things (and doing them well) only when demand grew so great they could no longer ignore them.

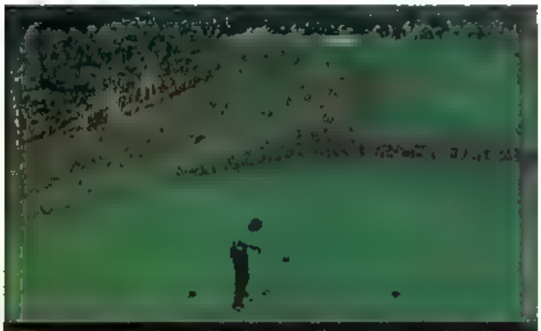
All of which makes the changes in *Links 2003* revolutionary. By far the most profound change is the introduction of Real-Time Swing (RTS), a swing interface in which the onscreen club moves in sync with the vertical movement of the mouse (there is no horizontal option in RTS). The *Links 2003*'s RTS feels similar to the superb TrueSwing interface (introduced in Sierra's PGA game and subsequently EA Sports' Tiger Woods sims) on drives and long irons, if perhaps just a little more sensitive, and it's definitely more touchy when putting and chipping. Until you get the feel for the short game, you'll find yourself hitting 20-yard chips 40 yards past the green and leaving 30-foot putts 20 feet short. The good news is that as in real life, lots of practice time will pay off in significantly improved results. The old tri-click arcade-style interface is still present, but most people will never go back to it once they get used to the subtleties and feel of the RTS. It adds a welcome new dimension to *Links 2003*.

The Real-Time Swing adds a completely new (and welcome) dimension to *Links 2003*.


The new 3D golfers in this version are a significant improvement over *Links*' previous digitized players.


The dynamic camera option delivers a great view of shot results but doesn't work with the new RTS.

A rarity in computer games: Annika Sorenstam, a virtual female without a 44-inch bustline.


The panoramic view option is a great way to appreciate the course layouts.

Accompanying the RTS is a change from digitized to 3D-rendered golfers. The new onscreen players look good, with a nice variety of pre- and post-swing animations. Other graphics changes include visually noticeable improvements in course textures and shadows. While there are only six courses included in the game (although older courses can be converted to the *Links 2003* format), they're varied and interesting. There's a static feel to the game, however—the only things moving are the pin flags and the golfers, and ambient sound is limited. This is a minor quibble, though, compared to the game's most disappointing shortcoming: The dynamic camera view, a great feature which presents a variety of active views of shots as they land, is not available if you use the RTS. Argh.

The rest of the game is what you would expect in a golf sim: good ball physics, great multiplayer options (including a neat e-mail tourney mode), handy tutorial lessons for beginners, a gazillion mode of play options, and a nice new career mode. The game ran flawlessly on everything from a Pentium II 866MHz machine to a 1GHz notebook to an AMD Athlon 2200+. As usual, Microsoft has delivered a solid game with *Links 2003*, and with the new RTS, it has retained its title as the king of the golf sims.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

***Links 2003* provides everything you'd expect in a *Links* golf game (that's good), plus a new real-time mouse swing.**

By The Developers of the Award-Winning Imperium Galactica™ and Imperium Galactica™ II

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LEGIONS OF IRON

IN 2104, MANKIND IS ENGAGED IN A FRATRICIDAL WAR BETWEEN EARTH AND MARS POPULATIONS. AFTER WEEKS OF FIERCE SPACE BATTLES AND HEAVY LOSSES, BOTH SIDES HAVE TO JOIN TOGETHER AND FORM THE LEGIONS OF IRON TO FIGHT A NEW ALIEN ENEMY FORCE.

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www.hegemonia.info

TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
VIOLENCE

POWERED BY gamespy

PC CD ROM

DIGITAL REALITY

wanadoo

DREAMCATCHER

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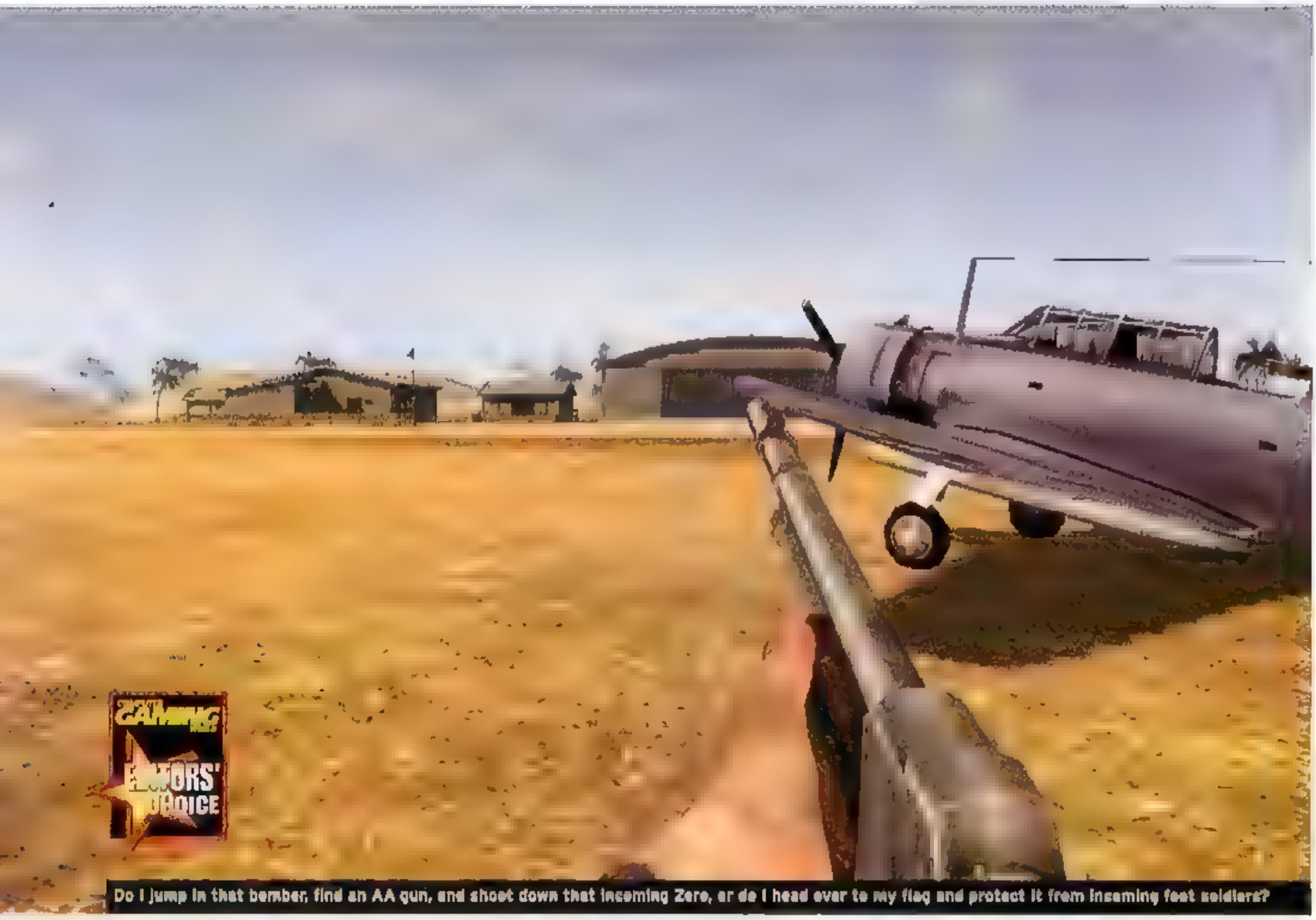


Do I jump in that bomber, find an AA gun, and shoot down that incoming Zero, or do I head over to my flag and protect it from incoming foot soldiers?

Battlefield 1942

There's no "I" in team-based multiplayer **By Tom Price**

PUBLISHER **EA**
DEVELOPER **Digital Illusions**
GENRE **Action**
URL **www.ea.com/eagames/official/battlefield1942/home.jsp**
ESRB RATING **Teen; violence**
PRICE **$49.95**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **Broadband (2-32 players), LAN (2-16 players)**

At the risk of sounding grossly reductionist, there seem to be essentially two kinds of games out there: those that take themselves seriously and those that don't. The former includes a lot of simulations and strategy games—games that focus on realism and detail. Games in the latter category are hard to pin a genre label on, but you can guarantee that if they're well designed, they're going to be a lot of fun. Count *Battlefield 1942* as one of these games.

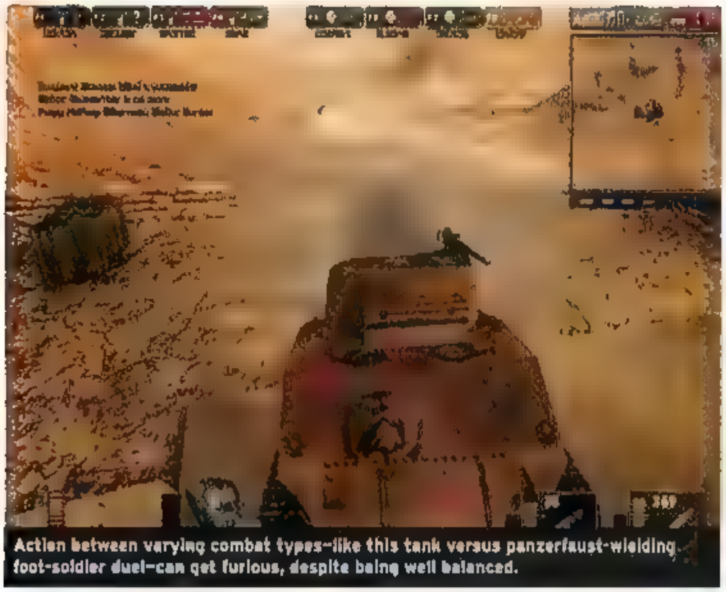
What makes *Battlefield* so much fun is its fast-paced multiplayer action combined with a complex yet easy-to-understand game model that allows players to take on any of a number of specified roles. *Battlefield 1942* is essentially *Tribes* in WWII. Like *Tribes*, *Battlefield* lets you choose what kind of job you want to undertake in battle: blowing stuff up, fixing stuff, healing stuff, or plain-old killing stuff. But add in the extra dimension of vehicles including jeeps, tanks, bombers, and humongous battleships the player can control—and you've got a game with more disparate possible experiences than you can shake a potato-masher grenade at.

Cooperation makes it happen

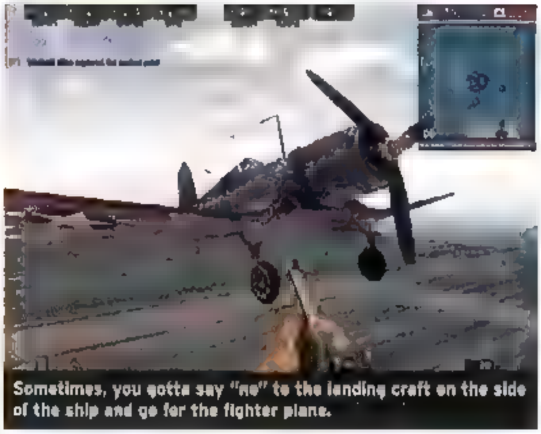
Controlling all of these vehicles and taking on all these different character roles demands a lot of coordination among players if you want to play the game to its full potential. But this raises one of the problems inherent in almost all massively multiplayer games that attempt to create truly cooperative gameplay situations. It has something to do with the culture and attitude of online gamers. How do you get people to actually work together and not just go off on their own and do whatever they want (like, kill their own teammates)?

Currently, it's hard to find a good online server full of people who'll actually wait for someone to take the tail-gunner position on a Stuka, or be a medic and run around healing people. Most of what you find on the public servers are people who want to play the game like *Counter-Strike*, just running-and-gunning. Of course, it's not the game's fault if people don't want to play it the way it was intended, but if it affects your enjoyment of the game, what are you going to do? Yeah, I'd join a clan, too.

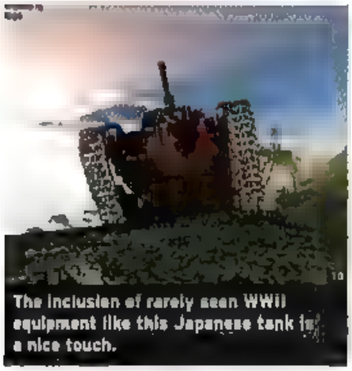
The other option: Look for a new server that has more advanced or committed gamers playing on it. But because *Battlefield*'s netcode is a little sketchy right now, it's hard to find a server on which you can get decent pings. And even when you do, teleporting and other laggy effects aren't always going to be completely absent.



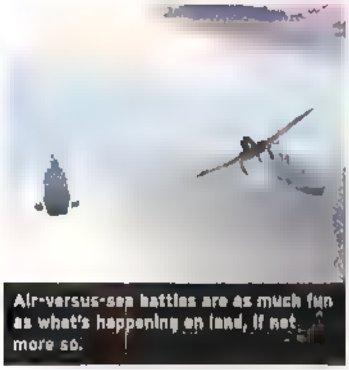
Action between varying combat types—like this tank versus panzerfaust-wielding foot-soldier duel—can get furious, despite being well balanced.



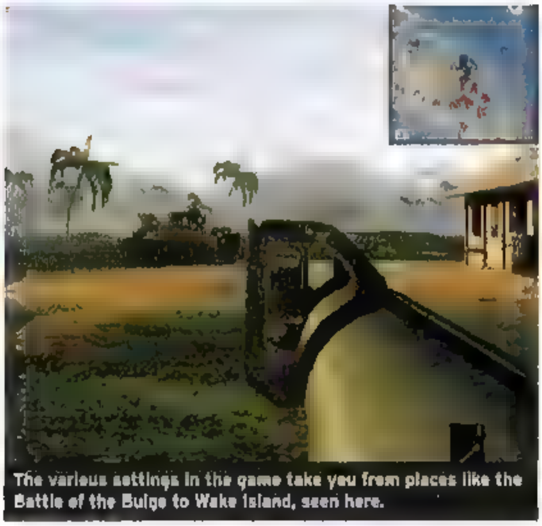
Sometimes, you gotta say "no" to the landing craft on the side of the ship and go for the fighter plane.



The inclusion of rarely seen WWII equipment like this Japanese tank is a nice touch.



Air-versus-sea battles are as much fun as what's happening on land, if not more so.



The various settings in the game take you from places like the Battle of the Bulge to Wake Island, seen here.

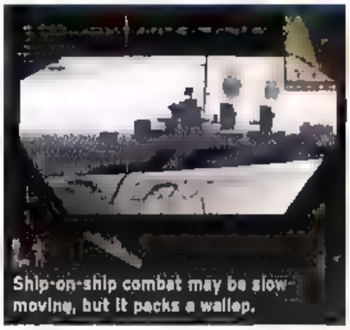
Fun over facts

But if everything works out—if you find a server that's running well with a lot of good, conscientious players on it who actually want to work together—*Battlefield* can be one of the most rewarding experiences in PC gaming. I think there are some oversights in the interface that make coordination a little tougher, like vague directions to where events are happening on the map if you don't have the full overlay map on. But still, the game is chock-full of great gaming moments: riding into battle in the gun turret of a half-track; swooping in low over an enemy airfield (and even sometimes landing a hit) while antitank rockets stream through the air at you; dueling fighter planes shooting each other down, pilots bailing out and engaging in a knife fight once they hit the ground. Stuff like this probably never actually happened in WWII, and it definitely never happened in any WWII-themed computer game, but it can and will happen in *Battlefield 1942*.

Now, I know I said that the theme of *Battlefield* is fun over factuality, but there is one little realism thing that gets under my skin a bit. Since the maps are set across the various theaters of WWII—Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, etc.—almost all of the major players are included. So, for the first time (that I can remember; I'm sure you'll be writing in to correct me), a combat FPS allows you to play sides like Japan and Russia in addition to the familiar Americans and Germans. But the weird thing is, only certain items are made country-specific. For instance, if you play as Japan, the planes available to you are Zeros, and the ships are all Japanese Navy-inspired. There's even a Japanese tank. But everything else—the guns, the transport vehicles, the fixed weapons—are German. Same goes for the British and American forces. It's a minor detail, but I think it would be cool if every item in the game were specific to its country of origin.

Battlefield 1942 is a fantastic game—ridiculously fun, completely infectious, and one of the best massively multiplayer designs I've seen in an action game. It seems to have something for everyone, except those dorks who don't want to play nice. They have a surprising ability to ruin it for everyone.

***Battlefield* has one of the best massively multiplayer designs ever for an action game.**



Ship-on-ship combat may be slow-moving, but it packs a wallop.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A blast if you can find some friends who are willing to man your turrets.

Earth 2150: Lost Souls

Interview with an expansion **By Tom Chick**

PUBLISHER Strategy First
DEVELOPER Zuxxez Entertainment
GENRE Real-time strategy
URL www.earth2150.com
ESRB RATING Teen; violence
PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 333, 64MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space, 8MB SVGA graphics adapter
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS None
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, Internet (2-8 players)

"Now, let's go over it again," the game reviewer says. "What are you?"

Earth 2150: Lost Souls sighs impatiently and replies, "I'm a follow up."

"You already tried that. There's no such kind of game. I need you to be more specific."

"I'm the next chapter in the *Earth 2150* series."

"OK, that's better. Are you a sequel?"

"I'm a stand alone chapter. It says so on the front of the box."

"Yes, it does. So would you say you're an expansion pack?"

"Yeah, I guess you could say I'm an expansion pack. A stand-alone one."

"OK. So what expansions do you include? What do you add to the game?"

Earth 2150: Lost Souls gnaws its lower lip and thinks for a moment. It squints up at the ceiling. "Single-player campaigns?" it finally says. "Three of them?"

"No new units? You're an RTS–"

"A damn good one, too," *Earth 2150: Lost Souls* interjects.

Bombs away! Nukes just like the ones in *Earth 2150*.

Just a bunch of single-player missions that could have been made with the scenario editor.

"Yes, I know. A damn good one. Solid A.I., fantastic engine, lively weapon variety, nimble interface, all that. But most RTS expansions tend to add new units, new game modes, maybe a whole new side. Do you have any of that?"

"I have three new single-player campaigns."

"And that's all?"

Where there's smoke...missile trails and dynamic lighting just like in *Earth 2150*.

"They're whole new campaigns. New story lines. Want to hear the backstory?"

"Not really. You're a real time strategy game, not a novel. So you're telling me you don't add anything since the last version of *Earth 2150*? Nothing at all?"

"New campaigns. Oh, and six new multiplayer maps."

The game reviewer regards *Earth 2150: Lost Souls* for a moment. It stares back obstinately. "OK," the reviewer says, "Let's talk about these campaigns. They're pretty difficult, aren't they?"

"Yep, lots of replay value. You'll spend hours trying to figure out trick solutions. You'll have to save and reload a lot."

"I see that a lot of your features are undocumented. Nothing about mounting weapons on buildings, constructing defenses, platoons, or the day/night cycle."

Earth 2150: Lost Souls shifts uneasily in its seat. The reviewer continues.

"There's still no listing of the unit and weapons types. Isn't the campaign hard enough for new players already?"

"Yeah, well, maybe they should have figured out that stuff in the earlier games."

"So you wouldn't recommend yourself to new players?"

"I didn't say that. That's not fair. You're trying to trick me."

"I see here your list price is $30."

Battle royale. Grand battles just like the ones in *Earth 2150*.

"$29.99."

"OK, $29.99. Isn't that kind of expensive?"

"Hey, *WarCraft III* was almost $60. And I bet you didn't make any cracks about not caring about the story line with that game. I bet you didn't tell that game it wasn't a novel. You know, there's no reason to be a jerk. I have feelings, too."

"No, you don't. You're a game. And a two star one at that. You should know better. Don't give me that 'next chapter' crap when you're really just a bunch of single-player missions that could have been made with the scenario editor."

Earth 2150: Lost Souls starts to protest, but thinks better of it. It takes its hat and disappears into the swirl of holiday releases.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

***Earth 2150* redux all over again, only harder and undocumented.**

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PC CD ROM

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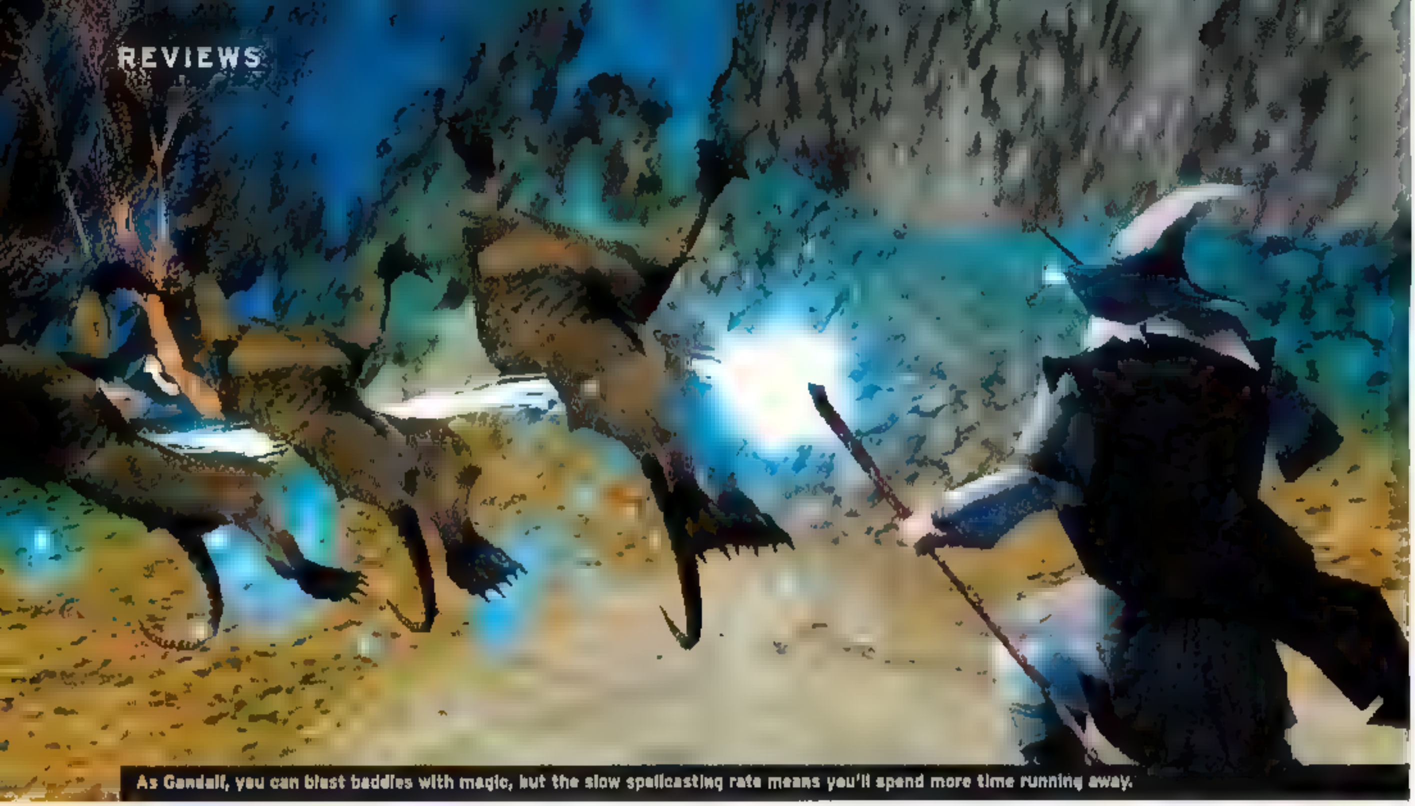


As Gandalf, you can blast baddies with magic, but the slow spellcasting rate means you'll spend more time running away.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

Who shot J.R.R.? **By Charles Ardai**

PUBLISHER **Universal Interactive** DEVELOPER **Surreal Software** GENRE **Action-adventure** URL **www.lordoftherings.com** ESRB RATING **Teen; blood, violence** PRICE **$49.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 600, 128MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 750** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **None**

No one expects a high-school production of *The Mikado* to equal the version you can see at the Metropolitan Opera. There are pleasures to be found at both, to be sure, but they're different pleasures, and if you're smart, you won't hit the high school auditorium the night after visiting the Met, when what might otherwise have been a perfectly pleasant experience will instead strike you as intolerably amateurish and crude.

The problem with Black Label Games' version of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* is that everyone who plays it is likely to have recently seen the stunning Peter Jackson movie of the same name. By comparison, the game (which features many of the exact same scenes as the movie, only with blocky CGI characters and horrible voice acting in place of photo-realistic animation and Ian McKellan) comes across as a high school-caliber effort at best.

Save, die, and restore at least 30 times, for what reward? Hearing Tom Bombadil sing.

Based on the original Tolkien novel rather than the film, the game attempts to carve out a niche for itself by including material the filmmakers omitted, such as Frodo's journey through the old forest, his visit with Tom Bombadil, and his singing-on-the-tabletop scene at the Prancing Pony Inn. Unfortunately, there's a reason Peter Jackson chose to omit those scenes, and as soon as you see Bombadil and Frodo tunelessly keening Tolkien's cringe inducing lyrics, you'll know why.

Gameplay involves maneuvering a single character (who's sometimes accompanied by other members of the Fellowship, sometimes not) through a 3D environment, fighting or sneaking past enemies, and picking up bits of food. You're Frodo in the Shire, Aragorn in Bree, Gandalf outside Moria, and so on. Gandalf has a few spells, although they take so long to cast that you'll find yourself running away from danger whenever possible. Aragorn kicks and waves his sword like a refugee from *Mortal Kombat*, while Frodo jumps, throws stones, and dies after a few seconds if you put on the One Ring to turn invisible. It's all pretty basic console action game stuff, and of a particularly annoying variety: I had to save, die, and restore at least 30 times to sneak past the Dark Riders in Hobbiton; then walk in circles for an hour in the maze-like forest; then die and restore another 30 times while fighting Old Man Willow; and all for what reward? Hearing Tom Bombadil sing.

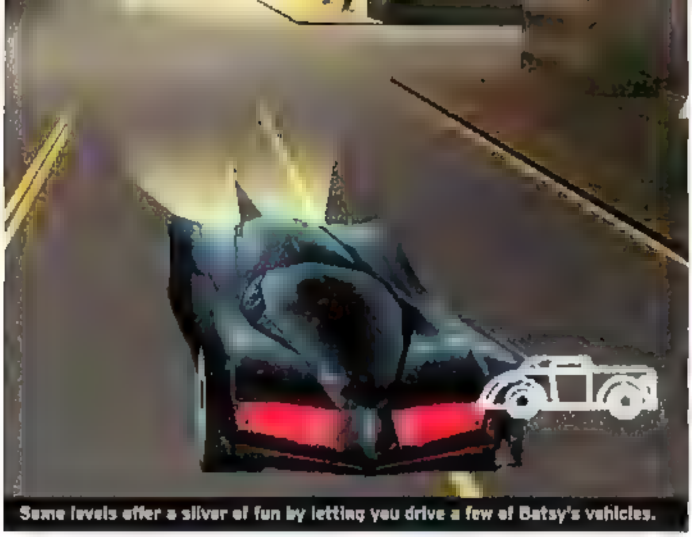
Aragorn's sword isn't made of wood—it just looks that way.

Things get better in Bree and Moria, and fighting the trolls on Weathertop is exciting, but all in a minor sort of way. You've seen plenty of better fights in plenty of better games. (It doesn't help that the computer keeps turning you around in battle so that your back is facing your enemy.) And the cut-scenes that stitch it all together pale beside the version you saw at the movies last year.

Anyone who wants a game of this sort will be happier with one of the modern versions of *Gauntlet*. And if you want something closer in spirit to the book, might we recommend...the book?

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Peter Jackson did it better.



Some levels offer a sliver of fun by letting you drive a few of Batsy's vehicles.

Batman: Vengeance

The Dark Knight gets crippled **By Jason Babler**

PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER Ubi Soft
GENRE Third-person action
URL batmanvengeance.ubisoft.com
ESRB RATING Teen; violence
PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 550MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 650 MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT None

It hasn't been a bright year for the Dark Knight. Frank Miller's disappointing *Dark Knight Strikes Again* was the first stab in my Batman fanboy heart. While *Batman: Vengeance* isn't nearly as important to fans of the series, a warning should be issued to any Batman-loving gamers looking to pick this up: Just walk away.

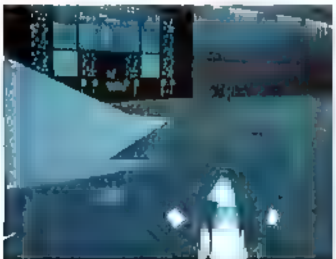
Batman: Vengeance was a PS2 game tagged with mediocre reviews. This is pretty much a direct port, but PC gamers aren't going to take too kindly to a couple of frustrating issues.

Generally speaking, the game is an unpolished turd. Level design seems even sparser than *Oni's*—PC gamers will see untextured walls within blocky levels and wonder if they even have a complete game in their hands. Jumping through a maze of beige crates in a warehouse and climbing through a factory just to turn some knobs are accurate descriptions of the 'choice levels. Furthermore, cut-scenes are a blurry mess that haven't been PC-optimized.

Imagine the frustration of being Batman and still getting your ass kicked by a bunch of thuggy mimes who can dodge batarangs—I kept screaming at the monitor: "I'm the freakin Batman and I'm getting my ass kicked by mimes?!" Yes, until you learn one simple trick: Go through a door, and the mimes are left in the room behind you. Otherwise, the combination of poor camera angles and sucky fighting controls lets enemies bear-hug you to death when mashing the A and D keys to free yourself suddenly doesn't work. Don't even attempt to use a gamepad because first-person aiming and moving slows to a pathetic crawl—not to mention that the game will suddenly remap your buttons after a level and not let you change them back.

Difficulty level is all over the place. Jumping off giant teetering mushrooms may seem easy, but due to poor controls and even worse collision-detection, you'll be replaying levels over and over just trying to leap from a building.

To top it off, I encountered a game-killing bug. The overwhelming feeling of an unfinished game compelled me to check the CD to make sure it didn't have "beta" scrawled on it. When I realized it was final code, all I heard was the sound of a guillotine coming down on ol' Bats. That alone should be a warning to any gamer wanting to plunk down money for this crap.



Levels are incredibly drab and a bore to navigate.

Imagine the frustration of being Batman and still getting your ass kicked by a bunch of thuggy mimes.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

Frustrating controls and inconsistent gameplay make you wish Batman died along with Robin.

Vazhat
by Full Sail Student
Brian German

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Age of Sail II: Privateer's Bounty

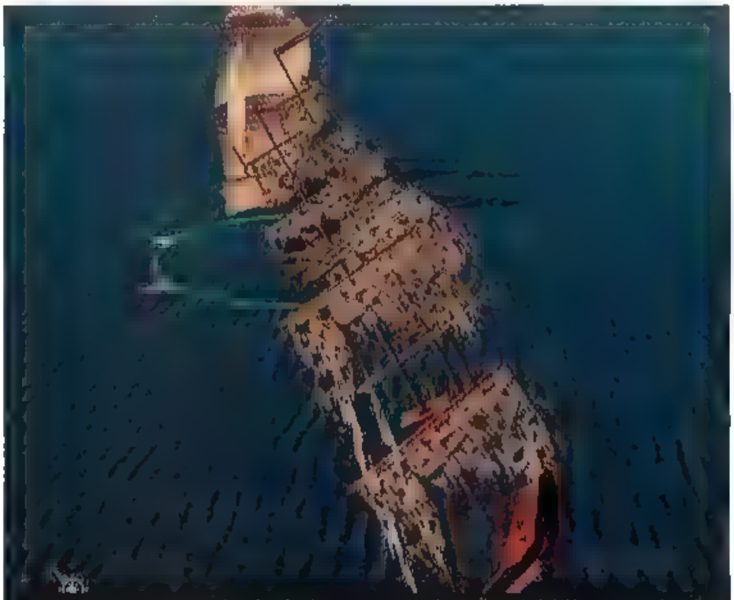
Run aground on a shoal of bugs **By Thomas L. McDonald**

PUBLISHER Global Star Software
DEVELOPER Akella
GENRE Naval warfare
URL www.globalstarsoftware.com
ESRB RATING Everyone
PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 480, 64MB RAM, 550MB hard drive space **RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS** Pentium 4 750, 128MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT** LAN, Internet (2-16 players)

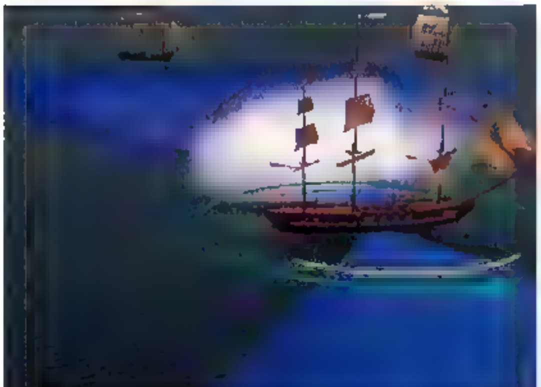
As he lay dying at the battle of Trafalgar, the great British naval hero Lord Nelson uttered his final, memorable words to the captain of his flagship: "Kiss me, Hardy!"

Well, they did live in very close quarters on those first-raters. Regardless, the age of wooden ships and iron men remains powerfully alluring and the original *Age of Sail* did a decent job of capturing the tactics of the period. *Age of Sail II* looked poised to take it to the next level with sharp 3D graphics and a simplified interface, but it didn't quite work out that way. As released, *AOS2* was that most frustrating kind of game: a good game made badly. Heaps of promise were buried beneath wall to wall bugs and design problems. *Privateer's Bounty* is a sort of sequel-cum-expansion pack that attempts to make good on the game's potential, fix the bugs, smooth out the interface, and create a usable game at last. While it actually does fix many things, it doesn't fix nearly enough.

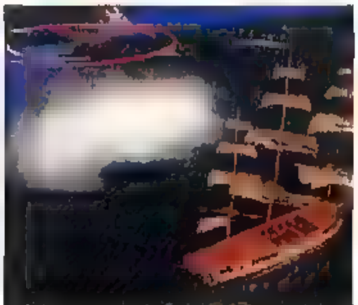

Submarines were never a major factor during the *Age of Sail*, but they make for a fun addition to the game nonetheless. Here, one is shown sinking a ship with a mine.

Control in *Privateer's Bounty* has been simplified and improved with an interface that quickly becomes second nature despite the lack of any tutorial. Missions run in real time with a full screen 3D view on the action. Small, configurable windows line the sides, placing all information and control elements at hand. Helm, weapons, sails, crew, waypoints, and other special functions are handled with ease. The only real interface problem comes from ship selection, since it can be difficult to pick out a particular ship when two or more are close together. There is one puzzling interface peculiarity: Ships default to battle sails whenever you set a waypoint.

Nautical A.I. Rule No. 1: Don't run into land.


The handling of viewing angles is one of the game's major failings. There's no simple way to rotate the camera, only a cumbersome workaround that never proves satisfactory.

Which brings us to the A.I., the game's most catastrophic failure. I know I'm going out on a limb here, but I have a few simple rules about nautical A.I. Rule No. 1: Don't run into land. Rule No. 2: Land shall be defined as anything that is not water. Rule No. 3: Ships are not amphibious. Enemy ship captains go into brain lock at regular intervals, particularly near land, which must have some alluring, siren-like hold on their tiny minds as it causes them to run into each other and beach their vessels. Frankly, your own captains fare little better, often ignoring the simple group commands you give them.

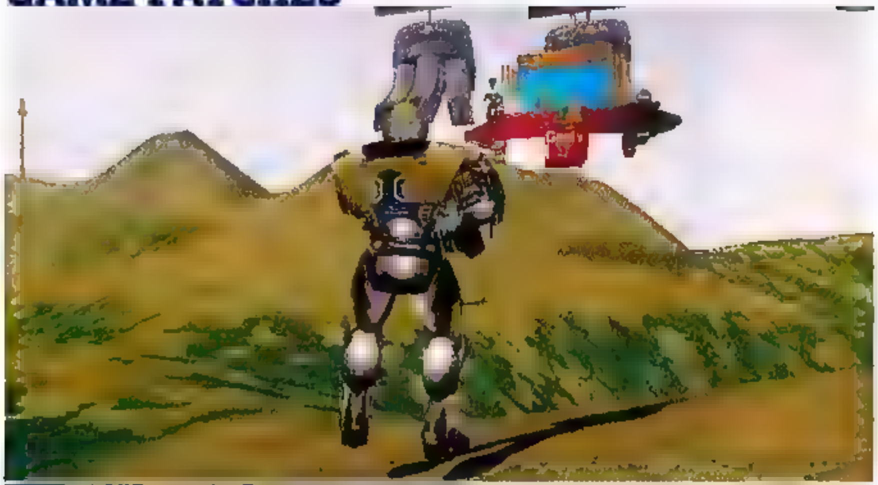

The graphics—while quite nice, particularly with the new, higher resolutions—slow to uselessness in larger battles.

Aside from the fixes and non-fixes *Privateer's Bounty* adds to the original with three new campaigns, 20 new missions, and five gimmicky-yet enjoyable units: hot air balloon, submarine, fireboat, bomb boat, and steam paddleboat. Historically, these had almost no impact in warfare, but they're fun additions nonetheless. One of the great joys of the game is its wealth of ships and scenarios, with an editor included to make even more.

As a serious naval warfare buff, I can't help but see *Privateer's Bounty* as a heartbreaking failure. They came so close to making a terrific game with *Age of Sail II*, they had a second chance to fix the problems, and they still blew it. Many of the worst crash bugs of the original persist in this version. It wasn't as though no one noticed the problems in *Age of Sail II*. Reviewers and fans alike hammered at them for the same problems that dismast *Privateer's Bounty*. There are certainly enjoyable moments in this game, but it's impossible to ignore its many failings.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

A game of amazing promise delivers mostly crushing disappointment



Revisionist History

Tribes 2

By Thomas L. McDonald

Tribes 2 generated some pretty heated responses when it was finally released in March 2001 after long delays. Some gamers—myself included—were willing to ride out the buggy complete release in order to play a truly deep and innovative team-based shooter. Others found that the long transit time across vast maps and changes from the classic *Tribes* made the game unenjoyable.

Despite the rocky launch, *T2* was working fine not too long after release, with fully functioning lobbies, decent framerates and networking code, and effective play balance. Earlier this year, Sierra announced plans for *Tribes: Fast Attack*, which would make maps smaller and the game faster. They began reworking *T2* and ultimately came up with a far-ranging patch that added game modes, improved the code, and included a Classic game style to speed things up. Since the patch does much of what *Fast Attack* was supposed to do, *Fast Attack* was cancelled. The new version was issued as a patch and repackaged as a budget title.

The main additions for this re-release update are two game modes new to *Tribes 2*: Team Rabbit 2 and Classic Tribes. TR2 is an improved version of the original Team Rabbit mod. Two teams try to grab a single flag and throw it through the opposing team's goal. The carrier can only hold the flag for 15 seconds before it gets too "hot" and kills him, placing the emphasis on creative passing. The quality of the pass is based on various elements—speed, height, distance, etc.—which are worth points that fill up a jackpot. If you score, you win the jackpot. The result is an interesting, fast-moving sport-cum-frag game with a limited following. Team Rabbit 2 is a very good addition to the *Tribes 2* world, but it requires practice and skill, and it has yet to really catch on with gamers.

Classic mode, however, is something many have wanted from the beginning: a faster-moving game with tighter maps. Classic accomplishes this by reintroducing "skiing," a trick from the original game that allows players to use a combination of hills and the Jump key to move very quickly across the landscape. Frankly, it feels odd and seems unbalanced compared to the finely-tuned, epic-scale battles that distinguished *T2*. The speed makes infantry more usable on large maps, but also makes vehicles less useful and renders turrets almost meaningless. This should certainly appeal to gamers who favor run-and-gun over the more tactical action of *T2*, but longtime *T2* players may find it a little tough to adapt to its physics and speed. Classic also adds 24 new maps and brings back the Defend and Destroy game from the original *Tribes*.

The last major change for the new *Tribes* is a fairly thorough overhaul of the code. Frame rates are much better now, but after a year and a half and numerous computer upgrades, they better be. *T2* still looks decent, but it never really relied on its looks. Its appeal was in its large scale and team-play elements, which have been retained and expanded while adding faster play for those who want it. At the new $10 price, it may help lure new players to the franchise and give Sierra some reason to keep *Tribes* alive.

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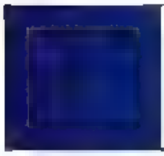


Prince of Qin

Heir to the porcelain throne

By Mark Asher

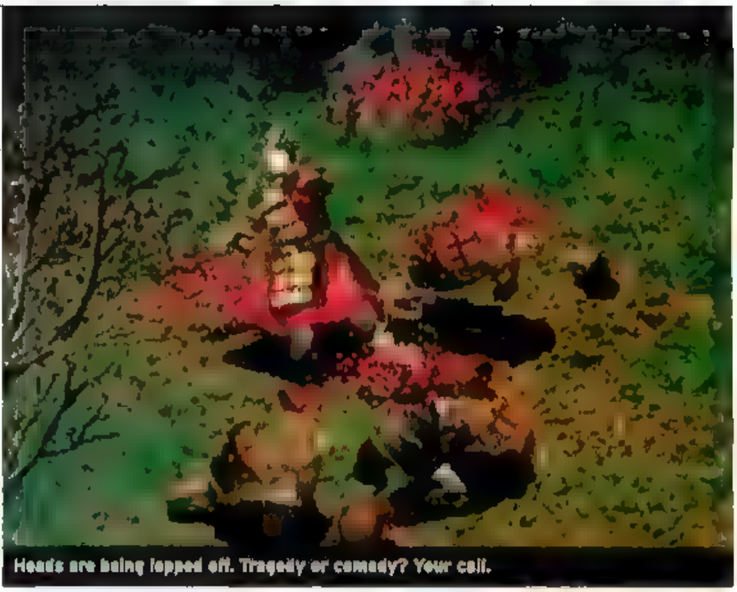
PUBLISHER **Strategy First** DEVELOPER **Object Software** GENRE **Role-playing game** URL **www.princeofqin.com** ESRB RATING **Teen; blood, violence** PRICE **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 850, 192MB RAM, 16MB 3D card** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **Internet (2-500 players, allegedly)**

Prince of Qin is ultimately a frustrating game. For every interesting twist Chinese developer Object Software (*Fate of the Dragon*) has inserted, there's an awkward, amateurish turn to follow. You're tantalized by some of the cool game features, such as making your own weapons, and the historical ancient-China setting, but then the game continually deflates your enthusiasm with washed-out artwork, the worst voice acting ever, and unimaginative gameplay. It's a game only the developers' mothers and hardcore RPG fans can love.

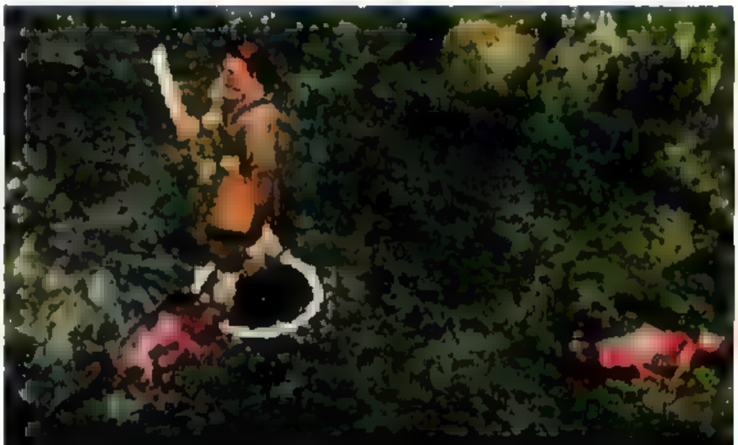
Prince of Qin is set 2,000 years ago during the Qin dynasty in China. The emperor's son, Fu Su, was sent to fight the Huns and then, through some court intrigue, was ordered to commit suicide. The game picks up at the culmination of these events with a twist—the prince ignores the order to kill himself and sets out to discover the truth behind the scheme. Cue up the one of the most unintentionally funny intros ever, with whirling blades and lopped-off heads, and voice acting that sounds like the deli delivery guy was dragged into the recording studio and handed a script. (In the game itself, one character might sound vaguely Asian, another straight out of the American Midwest, and another might have a British accent. This isn't ancient China—it's a taxi stand in New York.)

There are some good things about the game. You play through 11 chapters and have 80 or 90 quests to complete. Some are complex, and some are as simple as visiting the guy one house down. And speaking of houses, you can enter them (cool!), but many don't have anything inside (stupid!). You can collect items and make weapons, armor, and jewelry, which is fun. The problem is that once you make an item, you can't disassemble it, resulting in a lot of saving and reloading until you discover the right combinations.



Heads are being lopped off. Tragedy or comedy? Your call.

For every interesting twist, there's an awkward, amateurish turn to follow.



Fu Su fighting some scary, tiny walking fish in a cave—just one more lackluster enemy in a game full of them.

The in-engine cut-scenes are competent enough—as long as you ignore the horrible voice acting.

Prince of Qin also lets you control a party. You play as a paladin, but you can have a party of five, including witches, musclemen, assassins, and wizards. The game is real-time, but you can pause combat and assign targets for your group. While the combat can be interesting in a tactical way, it's more often about fighting mundane animals and soldiers than it is mythic beasts and fantastic foes. At times I felt like I was playing *EverQuest* on quaaludes, incessantly having to kill rats and small reptiles. I want to be a hero, not the Orkin man!

The developers did a poor job of making use of the backdrop of historical and mythological China. Don't be fooled by the multiplayer claims, either. It's nearly impossible to find a game—you have to enter a server IP address, and there is no publisher-sponsored server to play on, so that claim of playing with up to 499 other players is theoretical, at best.

Prince of Qin is only for the RPG-starved, although there's enough interesting stuff in the game to raise the hope that Object Software is warming up to something better. Let's hope the deli guy takes some voice-acting lessons.

VERDICT ★⯨☆☆☆

For every potentially cool element in *Prince of Qin*, there's a worse one waiting to kneecap it.

Empire Earth: The Art of Conquest

Absolutely artless **By Elliott Chin**

Pretend that it's outer space, even if it really is just a water map that's colored black.

PUBLISHER **Sierra Studios**
DEVELOPER **Mad Doc Software**
GENRE **Real-time strategy**
URL **www.sierrastudios.com**
ESRB RATING **Teen; violence**
PRICE **$29.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 350, 64MB RAM, 450MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 600, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **LAN, Internet (2-8 players)**

Empire Earth: The Art of Conquest offers three new campaigns, a new epoch, two new civilizations, a few new units, and a unique bonus for each of the original civilizations. It sounds like a lot, but it's almost nothing.

Two of the new campaigns are pseudohistorical, depicting events in ancient Rome and during World War II. The third campaign, set in a futuristic Asia, ushers in a new epoch for the game: the Space Age. The campaign missions are hard and arduous. While the challenge might excite some, the scenarios are daunting and just as likely to turn you away.

The new Space Age is a complete disappointment.

This is about as good as the graphics get.

The new Space Age is a complete disappointment. There are only a few new upgrades and units, plus a new Wonder that's useful only on space maps. The space maps are horrible—the designers took a water map and put a black void where the water is supposed to be. Spaceships look like tin cans and can't fly over land, and planets are floating platforms of rock.

The only rewarding additions in this expansion pack are the new, unique bonuses for each civilization, but they aren't well balanced at all. Some bonuses are useful for all epochs, while others can only be used for three; some are immensely powerful, while others are trivial.

Art of Conquest is a huge letdown that only the most hardcore *Empire Earth* fan might enjoy. Everyone else: steer clear.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆
Unbalanced, too tough, and poorly designed—you make the call.

Casino Empire

A tycoon game for mobster kids **By John Fletcher**

PUBLISHER **Sierra Entertainment**
DEVELOPER **Sierra Entertainment**
GENRE **Business simulation**
URL **casinoempire.sierra.com**
ESRB RATING **Teen; gambling, mild language, suggestive themes**
PRICE **$39.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 665MB hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **None**

Casino Empire is like the Vegas it represents: entertaining and technologically impressive, but also shallow and vaguely unsatisfying. You are put in charge of building a casino from the ground up. Succeed with one casino and you get hired by the next one on the Strip. The strategy is in developing the floor plan of your casino.

CE obviously aims to emulate the classic *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, but fails because it's missing *RollerCoaster Tycoon*'s hook: the ability to build your own roller coasters. In *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, all the placed objects, such as food stands and trash cans, are secondary to laying your own custom track. In *CE*, however, you can't build or customize your casino—you can only place objects. Without the hook of custom builds, all the selections in the world (and nobody will fault *CE* for skimping on selections or menu options) quickly become pedestrian. I mean, how excited can you really get putting in a row of video blackjack machines instead of traditional slots?

Nice décor themes don't make up for the fact that the player doesn't get to do anything with them.

CE compensates by offering the ability to host your own poker and blackjack tournaments. These are quite fun and make a nice break from the routine of building up your casino floor. Another nice touch is the personalities and events that come to your casino. My favorite by far is the thinly disguised Mike Tyson wandering the floor declaring, "I'll eat your children. I'll eat all the children."

Casino Empire is like Buddy's Casino, the first business you manage in the game: solid and full of promise, but ultimately unable to knock off the big boys further up the street.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆
Holds two pair when it really needs a full house.

Dirt Track Racing 2

Cheap thrills **By Gord Goble**

PUBLISHER **Infogrames**
DEVELOPER **Ratbag**
GENRE **Racing**
URL **www.us.infogrames.com/games/dirt_track_racing_2_pc**
ESRB RATING **Everyone**
PRICE **$19.95**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 800, 128MB RAM, 520MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D card** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **LAN, Internet (2-10 players)**

It was 1999 when Ratbag first treated PC motorsport fans to its filthily gritty, deliciously mud-encrusted *Dirt Track Racing* series. One year later came *Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars*, then six months later *Leadfoot*—both of which capitalized on Ratbag's authentic slip-sliding physics and nifty career-oriented concept. With the latest Ratbag volley, *Dirt Track Racing 2*, the Australian-based developer delivers a prettier and slightly deeper game than its first effort but otherwise holds true to the original formula. Highly recommended to anyone who's never experienced the unique Ratbag style, *DTR2* may, nevertheless, be too familiar for some returning drivers.

In *DTR2*, spinning your tires through 14 new circuits—a variety of ovals, tri-ovals, and two heart-stopping figure eights—is just part of the story. You'll begin your career at the bottom of racing's pecking order in a low-level hobby series with just a few measly dollars in your pocket and only four disheveled, wide-bodied circa-1970 muscle cars from which to choose. As you progress from Pro Stock to Modified and Late Model classes, you'll handle many of the duties associated with running a real race team.

Bing bang boom! One sure way to damage or destroy your engine is to plow head-first into an oncoming competitor.

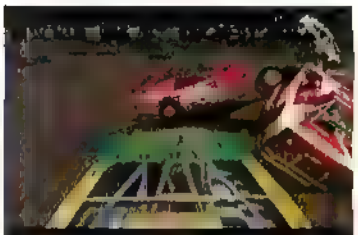
***Dirt Track Racing 2* spins your tires through 14 new circuits—a variety of ovals, tri-ovals, and two heart-stopping figure eights.**

You'll purchase upgraded parts with your winnings, but not so many that you can't afford a more prestigious racing series for the upcoming season. You'll agree to sponsorship offers, but preferably keep them short term so you aren't forced to pass up potentially more lucrative future deals. You'll drive aggressively, but not so aggressively that you're constantly saddled with repair bills. And you'll tweak your setup to better manage your vehicle's thrilling four-wheel-drifting physics through each distinctive track layout and racing surface.

Dancing with cars—two formerly pristine modifieds bounce end-over-end after an unintentional meeting in the middle of a figure-eight course.

Unfortunately, Ratbag has failed to eliminate some of the irritating quirks of the first game. In *DTR2*, you can far too easily cut down the inside of a given corner and bop your nearby competitors out of the way, without so much as a retaliatory action. You can over-rev your engine till the cows come home and never incur motor damage. In fact, the only way to damage your motor—or any other component, for that matter—is to hit something. Yet the game's damage modeling is so forgiving that cars can soldier on after multiple collisions and even one or two airborne forays.

Talk dirty to me. If you forget to remove your tear-off strip, your visor grows increasingly mud-encrusted.



Danger zone: The criss-cross junction of a figure-eight circuit is a very scary place to be.

Certainly, *DTR2* looks substantially less primitive than its predecessors. Although it will never be mistaken for *NASCAR Racing* and continues to skew certain perspectives, its cars are now more colorful and detailed and its environments considerably more varied and lifelike. The game's interfaces are more sophisticated, and the replay component introduced in *DTR: Sprint Cars* offers exhilarating alternate glimpses into the preceding mayhem. In-car audio, comprised of several less-than-dramatic engine notes, too few peripheral sound effects, and a repetitive track announcer is uninspired. And Multiplayer *DTR2* at gamespy.com proved that warping is still very much part of the *DTR* world.

Dirt Track Racing 2 delivers an exciting mud-splattering ride, a comprehensive off-track world, and an approachable price point. Though some may find it too similar to its three-year-old ancestor, few will be disappointed in the overall experience.

VERDICT ★★★½☆
Better-than-budget-game racing at a budget-game price.

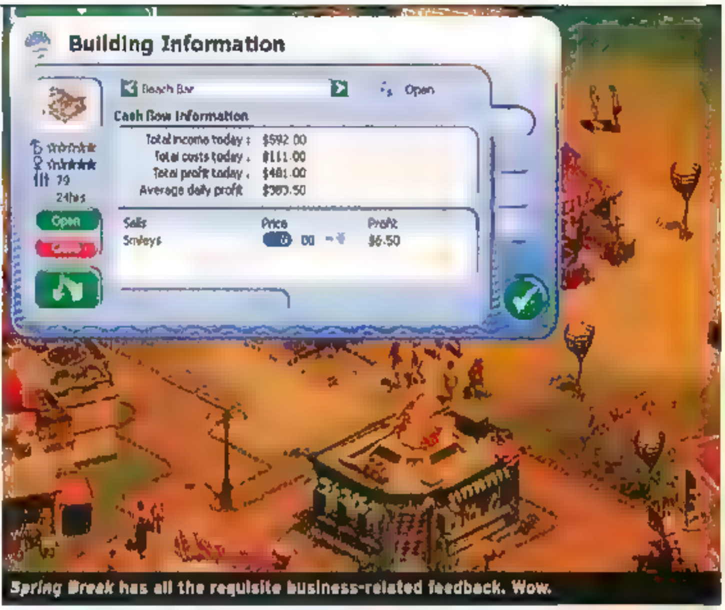
Virtual Resort: Spring Break

Like spring break in Berlin

By Rick Ernst

PUBLISHER **Eidos**
DEVELOPER **Deep Red**
GENRE **Business sim**
URL **www.eidos.com**
ESRB RATING **Teen; mature sexual themes, mild violence, use of alcohol**
PRICE **$29.99**

REQUIREMENTS **Pentium II 450, 128MB RAM, 950MB free hard drive space**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS **Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 16MB graphics card**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT **None**



Total income today : $592.00
Total costs today : $111.00
Total profit today : $481.00
Average daily profit $365.50

Sells	Price	Profit
Smileys	8.00	$6.50

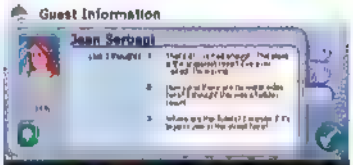
Spring Break **has all the requisite business-related feedback. Wow.**

Warning! The review you are about to read is not suitable for children! You won't believe what these virtual coeds do when you play *Virtual Resort: Spring Break!* You've seen the late-night commercials, now you can play a game with similar production values and intended audience.

Actually, *Virtual Resort: Spring Break* is, with few exceptions, unsuitable for anyone. Those few exceptions would be the unlikely gamers who enjoy business simulations but find roller coasters to be too highbrow. At its core, *Spring Break* is not a horrible game, although it is by no means a good one. It follows the tried-and-true formula of putting the player in charge of a business, placing various obstacles to profitability in his way; and letting him build, hire, and manage his way to financial success. In this case, the business is an island resort; the obstacles are sharks, bad water, and not enough drunken revelry. To meet his goals, the player can build an assortment of beach-oriented concessions such as theme bars, barbecues, and snorkel rental huts. Of course, there are also staffing concerns (pool cleaners, lifeguards, smiley clipboard-toting reps) and plenty of micromanagement options—you can control everything from staff hours to beer strength to the price of suntan lotion.

Anyone who's made it through puberty will likely be embarrassed by the game's lame toilet humor.

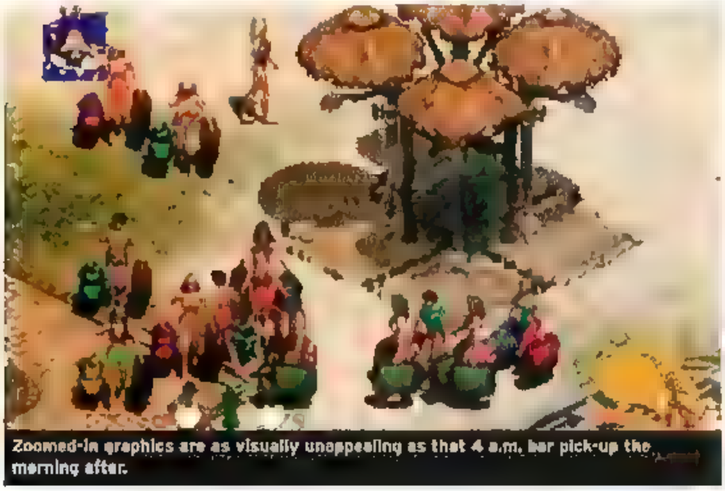
Aside from its annoyingly smiley presentation that, to be fair, mimics that of real-world resorts, *Spring Break* initially seems halfway decent. Sadly, the apparent quality breaks down quickly. Like most tycoon-style games, the graphics are bright, detailed, and 2D, but unlike other games, zooming in on the eye-in-the-sky point of view just provides a close-up of some very pixelated sprites. And although there are a fair number of structures and concessions, other elements of the game are strangely limited. One glaring shortcoming is a lack of variety in your visitors. Even though hair color and clothing are varied in the main view there are only four character portraits to represent all of your spring breakers.



How unrealistic is the game? Since when do drunken revelers worry if it's legal to take a whiz in the street?

Almost as limited as their appearance are your visitors' thoughts. Short quotes give you insight into what your little sunburned complainers like and dislike—unfortunately, there is practically no variety. Everyone either loves the beer or gets sick, they either have a lousy night's sleep or liken the bedding to the thighs of a virgin (no, I'm not kidding). Anyone who's actually made it through puberty will be embarrassed by the game's lame toilet humor (visitors waxing eloquently about their restroom activities and urinating fountains are some of the high points).

To top it off, the soundtrack is also extremely limited; you probably won't make it through the tutorial before you're ready to hang the DJ, but at least the game allows you to play your own MP3s. My recommendation? Play *RollerCoaster Tycoon* with a National Lampoon movie on in the background.



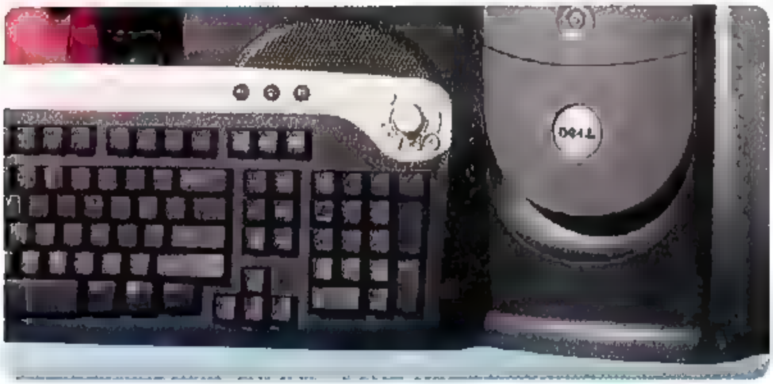
Zoomed-in graphics are as visually unappealing as that 4 a.m. bar pick-up the morning after.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆

Perfectly captures that "waking in a pool of your own filth in a stranger's bathroom, riddled with vague regrets" part of spring break.

Tech

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money **Edited by William O'Neal**



THE TENTH ANNUAL

ULTIMA

GAME M

SHOOTOUT

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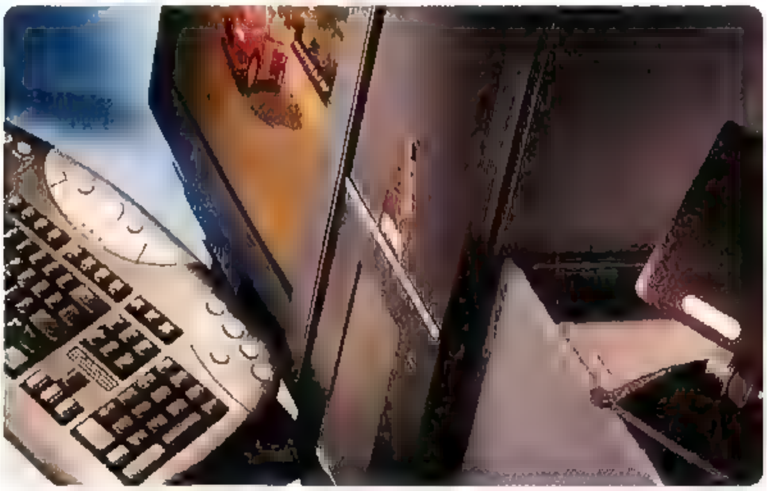
SEVEN TOP SYSTEMS UNDER $4,000 SLUG IT OUT FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE

ACHINE

BY WILLIAM O'NEAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO



ULTIMATE
GAME
MACHINE
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
★★★★½

THE VICIOUS PC PALADIN

Paladin superfast, but it's a well-designed rig as well.

Wow—it's been 10 years already. A decade of bruising competition for the annual title of Ultimate Game Machine. During this time, the UGM competition has seen more drama than *Peyton Place*, with manufacturers accusing one another of everything from fudging prices to submitting machines that aren't available on their websites. Considering that even the last-place finisher is usually a system any gamer would kill for, it's funny that the system builders have become so competitive. Well, sort of funny. After all, when you think about it, people's livelihoods are at stake, and it's that realization that makes this roundup so difficult to do.

In past years, we've rated the systems on criteria ranging from price and performance to technical-support reputation. This year, in hopes of avoiding any subjectivity, we decided to rate the machines solely on raw speed. We asked all participating manufacturers to submit systems—each complete with a 21-inch monitor and speakers—that cost no more than $4,000. The systems had to be submitted by the end of September, and each machine had to be available on its respective company's website at the time this issue ships to subscribers in late November. Seven manufacturers rose to the challenge—and this year's results were shocking, to say the least.

THE LAST-PLACE FINISHER IS STILL A SYSTEM ANY GAMER WOULD KILL FOR.

RUNNING WITH THE PACK

Though we received seven different systems, many shared common components. Most systems were equipped with a 3GHz Pentium 4 processor (two had 2.8GHz processors), and every system came with the new 128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro

HYPER-THREADING

Five of the machines in this roundup shipped with Intel 3.06GHz Pentium 4 processors, which support Intel's latest technology: Hyper-Threading (HT). HT allows one HT-enabled CPU to process two threads simultaneously, essentially creating two logical processors within one physical processor (in a machine running Windows XP Home or Pro with Service Pack 1). While Intel claims that by press time, all 533MHz, FSB-capable Intel chipsets will support HT, only the Falcon and Vicious machines came to us with motherboards offering BIOS that actually supported it: the Intel D850EMV2 and the Gigabyte P4Titan533. As of our testing, Asus had yet to release an HT-capable BIOS.

Not that it necessarily matters. That's right—I found that enabling Hyper-Threading didn't have a significant effect on game performance. In fact, in some tests, it seemed that HT actually hindered performance, though not so much that it noticeably affected game performance. The reason, it seems, that HT isn't terribly advantageous for gaming is that it's designed to benefit multithreaded applications. And so far, few if any games actually use multithreading. What will make you appreciate HT right now is those occasions when you absolutely must play *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* at the same time you're burning a music CD.

graphics card. The boutique PC shops overclocked their graphics cards to boost performance over that of the major manufacturers like Dell and Gateway.

The top three finishers in our roundup all boasted overclocked graphics cards. I considered asking companies to avoid overclocking, but that's not a realistic request since many specialty-system makers offer overclocked machines on their websites. Some manufacturers have been shipping overclocked machines to reviewers even though their companies don't actually sell overclocked machines. We've been assured that the machines sent to us are available in the same configurations we looked at, overclocking and all. If any companies balk on this, they'll be called on it.

THE VICIOUS PC PALADIN

The big surprise this year? Top honors don't go to Voodoo, Alienware, or Falcon Northwest, but to the new kid, Vicious PC. The Vicious machine's awesome performance made that decision a no-brainer. However, the 128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro was overclocked higher than any other card in this roundup. The core clock runs at 391MHz, and the memory clock is cranked to 337MHz–compare that with the respective manufacturer settings of 325MHz and 310MHz. The result is a machine that scored an amazing 16882 in 3DMark2001SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off. The Vicious machine went on to post the highest numbers in the next three 3DMark2001SE Pro tests, 1024x768x32 with 4X FSAA turned on, and 1600x1200x32 with 4X FSAA turned on and off.

The Vicious PC was one of two machines that shipped with the Gigabyte P4Titan533 motherboard, which boasts Hyper-Threading (HT) support. On the component side, this machine is a beast, and we're sure its 3GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor with 533MHz FSB, 1GB of Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM, and Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card had a lot to do with its great showing.

Voodoo doesn't take cooling for granted. The E-Class Glycol machine features three big fans and a digital temperature readout.

The E-Class Glycol also ships with a liquid-cooled radiator. According to Voodoo, the Glycol-filled reservoir should last as long as the machine.

A sleek looking package–Voodoo moved away from glitz and built a classy system.

POWERFUL PERSONAL COMPUTER
COMPUTER GAMING
EDITORS' CHOICE
★★★★★
VOODOO E-CLASS G

Alienware's Area 51-M was not only the most stable of the overclocked rigs, but it sported a dope iridescent paint job.

ALIENWARE AREA-51

Overclocking made the difference in the Vicious PC's performance, but also created stability issues in *Dungeon Siege* and *IL-2 Sturmovik*. In *Sturmovik*, we saw visible screen artifacts during certain segments of the demo, and twice, the game quit to the desktop in the middle of the demo (nothing a simple reboot couldn't handle, and I was unable to repeat the occurrence). The artifacts disappeared once I tuned down overclocking, but the machine's performance in that game also diminished. Similarly, *Dungeon Siege* quit to the desktop twice at 1600x1200x32 with 4X FSAA turned on before successfully completing the demo. I also had to test *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* in Win 98 compatibility mode. Still, I expected the Vicious rig's copious overclocking to cause a complete crap-out after a week of intense testing, but the machine fired up every time and, aside from these few issues, was rock solid.

Because Vicious is a relatively new operation, I'm reluctant to give it the nod over more proven outfits. But this contest was about performance, and the Vicious machine has it. However, before you run out and buy one of your very own, be sure you're happy with the company's warranty policies relative to those of the other contenders. I'd also suggest requesting a machine that isn't overclocked quite so drastically.

OVERCLOCKING HAD EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE VICIOUS PC'S PERFORMANCE.

U.S. AIR FORCE
Thunderbirds
FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V PENTIUM 4

The Falcon Northwest Mach V Pentium and Mach V 2800+ showed up with patriotic paint jobs.

RADEON 9700 PRO
RADEON
9700 PRO

MADE W[illegible]

[illegible] amazing RAD[illegible]
faste[illegible] powered [illegible]
the ultimate 3D gam[illegible]
8 pipelines for [illegible]
support Direct[illegible]
level of realism possible [illegible]

ATI

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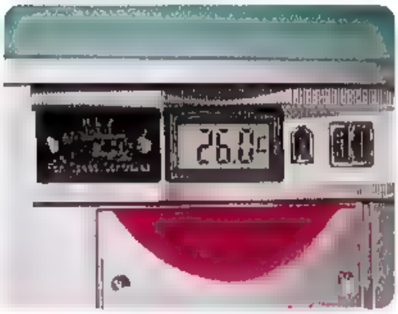
VOODOO E-CLASS GLYCOL

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't expecting a repeat performance from last year's winner, Voodoo PC. Like the Vicious rig, the Voodoo E-Class Glycol was overclocked, but it boasted better stability as a result of its awesome, Glycol-filled, liquid-cooled radiator, which ran coolant from the top of the case back down to the overclocked Radeon 9700 Pro, which was right by a trio of fans. The Voodoo scored an impressive 16806 on 3DMark2001SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off—that's a scant 76 points fewer than the Vicious machine's score. Unlike the Vicious rig, however, the Voodoo machine ran every benchmark flawlessly, with the exception of the artifacts that appeared in *IL-2 Sturmovik*. It seems that *Sturmovik* just doesn't like overclocked Radeons.

The Voodoo was right on the heels of the Vicious machine in nearly every test and soundly whupped it in every *Jedi Knight II* test. In fact, the two machines were so close in performance that it hurts to not let Voodoo share the title, but rules are rules. Unlike the Vicious rig, the Voodoo machine shipped with just 512MB of RDRAM and a single 120GB IBM DeskStar hard drive. Voodoo also shipped its machine with Asus' P4T533 C motherboard; its BIOS (at press time) doesn't offer Hyper-Threading support. Had Voodoo overclocked its machine to the extent that Vicious did, it's likely it would've taken the crown (though it would probably have run into the same stability issues that befell the Vicious rig).

Where Voodoo stands out is in the company's choice of peripherals. The 21-inch NEC MultiSync FE2111SB monitor is excellent for gaming, and anyone who's read this mag knows I prefer the Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 5100 speakers to the Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s. Another nice touch is the Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combination drive.

If there's one thing Voodoo does consistently, it's build superfast machines that are also extremely stable. Considering that the company is overclocking its rigs, that's quite a feat—and one that makes it easy to recommend this rig.



The panel on the front of the Diablo X7 lets you monitor the system's temperature.

ALIENWARE AREA-51

Alienware is always in the thick of things, and this year's Area-51 machine didn't let us down. Its configuration was similar to that of the Voodoo offering—3GHz Pentium 4, Asus P4T533-C motherboard, and 512MB of Samsung PC 1066 RDRAM—but Alienware added touches like a 200GB Western Digital hard drive and was the only company to ship its rig with Logitech's awesome *Z-680* speakers.

The Area-51 machine, while overclocked, didn't suffer the same stability and/or visual issues that plagued the other two overclocked machines. Every test ran smoothly, and this machine proved to be the most stable of all the overclocked rigs. Its score of 16050 in 3DMark2001SE Pro at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off was impressive, and it was one of only three machines in this roundup to score in the 16000s. In every other test, the Area-51 was right behind the top two rigs. In fact, it tied the Vicious machine with a 3D GameGauge 3.0 score of 85 and soundly won the *Dungeon Siege* battle. Furthermore, the Area-51 received the best scores in *IL-2 Sturmovik* and *Comanche 4* at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off.

Like the Dell rig, the Area-51 showed up with Creative Labs' latest soundcard, the Audigy. However, by the time this story hits, we expect that nearly all of these manufacturers will offer the Audigy2 as an option.

With rock-solid stability, a top-notch list of components, and Alienware's newfangled tech-support system, it's safe to say that the Miami-based company is still at the top of its game.

FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V PENTIUM 4 3.0

While companies like Voodoo, Alienware, and Vicious take the overclocking road to UGM glory, Falcon takes a longer view: The company didn't overclock this rig. What it does offer is a superfast machine that's about as stable as you could hope for.

ABS DIABLO X7

Diablo X7 was plenty solid, but its 2.8GHz Pentium 4 CPU made it no match for the 3GHz behemoths that the other builders submitted.

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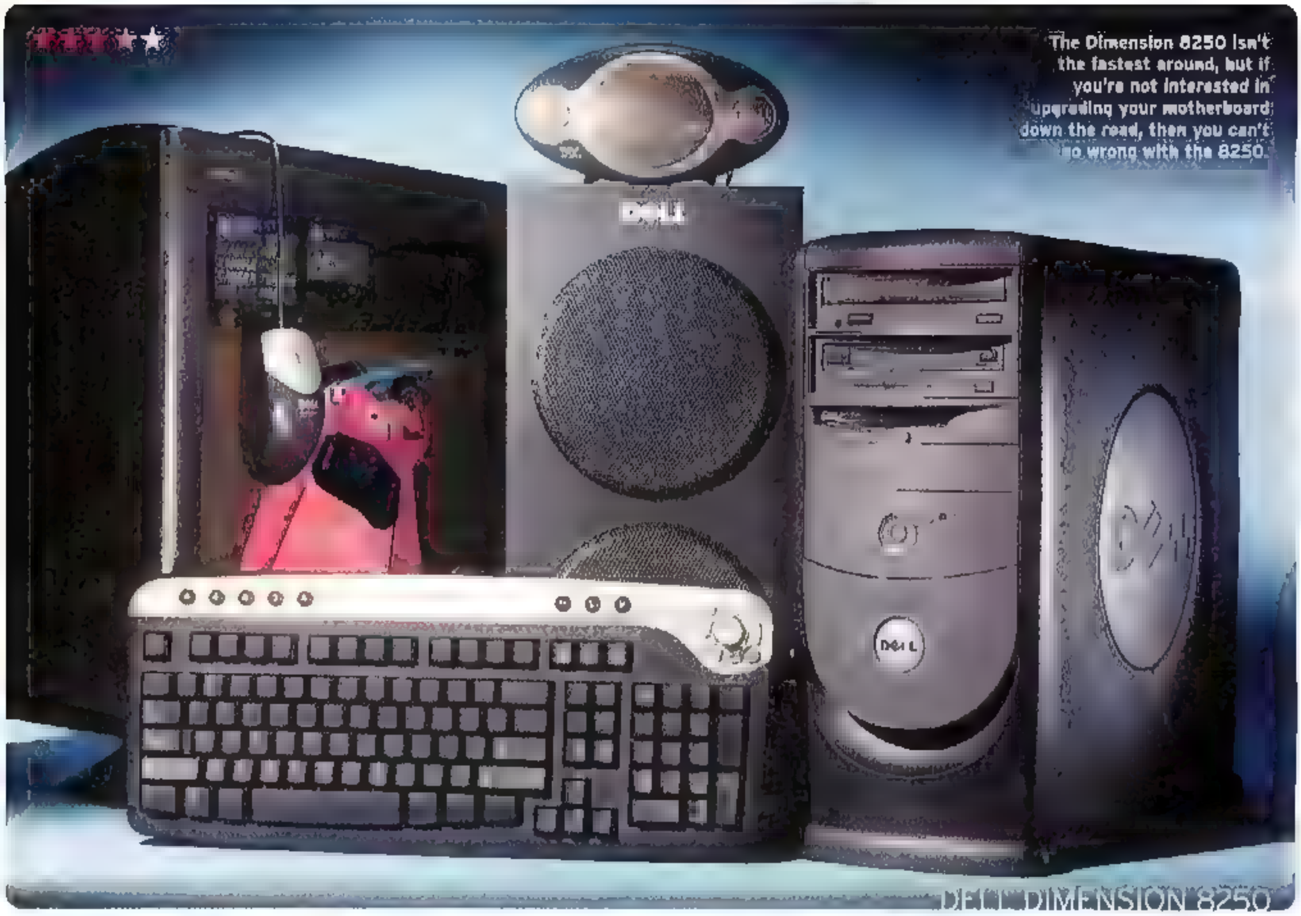


The Dimension 8250 isn't the fastest around, but if you're not interested in upgrading your motherboard down the road, then you can't go wrong with the 8250.

Eight is enough! The Dimension 8250 ships with eight USB ports, six on the back and two beneath the flip-up panel on the front.

from a company that will support you better than A.C supported O.J. You need to make a run for the border? I get the feeling that if you're a Falcon customer, they'll drive you.

The Mach V Pentium 4 3.0 that Falcon submitted showed up with Intel's D850EMV2 motherboard, which, while slower than the Asus and Gigabyte boards the other machines boast, is superstable and supports Hyper Threading. Yes, in a sense, Falcon is being punished for its strict adherence to stability and specifications. And it's this same aversion to wild risk-taking that's earned the company such a solid reputation.

During testing, the Mach V was right there with the top three machines. Its 3D GameGauge 3.0 score of 82 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off is just three points below the 85 earned by the Vicious and Alienware machines. And while its 3DMark2001SE Pro score of 15777 looks low next to the 16882 that Vicious scored, it's important to remember that Vicious paid for that score in stability issues. That said, the Mach V won two key tests, *Comanche 4* and *IL-2 Sturmovik* at 1024x768x32 with 4X FSAA turned on.

While Falcon's Mach V comes in fourth in this roundup, it's the fastest of the non-overclocked machines we saw—an important distinction that cannot be overlooked. If you're looking for a rock solid rig in which you know exactly what you're getting—and one with components that aren't tweaked out of warranty—you can't go wrong with Falcon.

ABS DIABLO X7

In this, its first year in the UGM, ABS made a classic error and submitted its machine first. Because of that, it was one of two machines that showed up with a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor, as opposed to the 3GHz chips the other companies waited for.

Similar to the Alienware and Voodoo machines, ABS' machine is built around the Asus P4T533-C motherboard, so by the time you read this, I'm sure a 3GHz model will be available. The machine is pretty solid and boasts nice touches, like the USB and FireWire ports on the front and a temperature gauge to let you know when things are getting hot inside. On the downside, this machine has more fans than Scooter has free e-mail accounts, and let me tell you—this baby is loud!

FALCON OFFERS A SUPERFAST MACHINE THAT'S ABOUT AS STABLE AS YOU COULD HOPE FOR.

When it came to the benchmarks, the Diablo X7 is definitely outgunned by the better equipped and overclocked rigs. But its 3DMark2001SE Pro score of 15505 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off is respectable; it's safe to say that any game you're playing these days won't push this beast past its limit.

DELL DIMENSION 8250

While its machine lags behind the boutique rigs in our performance tests, it's easy to understand why Dell is kicking everyone's ass when it comes to number of units moved. Sure, its machine's 3DMark2001SE Pro score of 15501 at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off pales compared to the 16882 that the Vicious scored, but the question is duly begged: Are those additional 1000 points worth $1,000?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 139

TO OVERCLOCK OR NOT TO OVERCLOCK

The issue of overclocking has been a thorn in the side of reviewers (and the occasional customer) for some time. Back in the old days (1998), overclocking made a lot of sense; an overclocked 3dfx card versus one with factory settings was the difference between getting 40 frames per second versus 30fps in *GLQuake*. Now, with a 3GHz Pentium 4 with a Radeon 9700 Pro rocking factory settings, overclocking may get you 90fps in *Dungeon Siege* as opposed to 85fps. When you consider the warranty and stability issues that overclocking your graphics card may create, getting five more frames per second in *Dungeon Siege* may not be worth it. Why do manufacturers continue to overclock their machines? The answer is simple: to win roundups and impress hardcore gamers like you and me. If you decide to buy one of the machines in this roundup, ask yourself how important those few extra frames per second are. While all of the manufacturers whose machines participating in this roundup warranty their products, check the company's technical support record closely, especially if they're overclocking the graphics card. That act may void ATI's warranty and leave the burden of replacing any damaged products on the shoulders of the system builder.

The Gateway 700XL ships with a DVD-RAM /DVD-R drive.

Gateway put together a nice-looking machine that—while it isn't very fast—is enough power for [illegible]ual gamers.

THE UGM ROUNDUP

Manufacturer/ Model	Vicious PC Paladin	Voodoo E-Class Glycol	Alienware Area-51	Falcon Northwest Mach V Pentium 4 3.0	ABS Diablo X7	Dell Dimension 8250	Gateway 700XL
Price	$4,000	$4,000	$3,863	$3,995	$3,378 99	$2,999	$3,569
Score	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★½
URL	www.vicious.com	www.voodoopc.com	www.alienware.com	www.falcon-nw.com	www.buyabs.com	www.dell.com	www.gateway.com
Operating System	Windows XP Professional Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 [redacted]	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB
Motherboard	Gigabyte P4Titan533	Asus P4T533-C	Asus P4T533-C	Intel D850EMV2	Asus P4T533-C	Proprietary board supplied by Intel	Proprietary board supplied by Intel
Memory	1GB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM	512MB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM	512MB Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM	512MB PC-1066 RDRAM	512MB PC-1066 RDRAM	1GB Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM	512MB Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM
Hard Drive	Dual 80GB Maxtor 7200RPM hard drives in a RAID config	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM hard drive	200GB Western Digital 7200RPM hard drive	Dual 189GB IBM Desk Star 7200RPM hard drives in a RAID config	Dual 80GB Maxtor 7200RPM hard drives in a RAID config	200GB Western Digital 7200RPM Digital hard drive	Dual 200GB Western 7200RPM hard drive in a RAID config
Graphics Processor	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro (128MB)	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro (128MB)	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro (128MB)	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro (128MB)	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro (128MB)	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro w/ TV-out (128MB)	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro w/ TV-out (128MB)
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster X-Gamer	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy2	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy2	Creative Labs Sound Blaster X-Gamer	Creative Labs Sound Blaster X-Gamer	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy2	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba 16X DVD-ROM drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW drive	Liteon 16X DVD-ROM drive	Toshiba 16X DVD-ROM drive	Liteon 16X DVD-ROM drive	16X DVD-ROM drive	DVD-RAM/DVD-R drive
CD-RW Drive	Plextor 40/12/40 CD-RW drive	N/A	Plextor 40/12/40 CD-RW drive	N/A	Plextor 40/12/40 CD-RW drive	DVD+RW/+R drive	48/24/48 CD-RW drive
Monitor	22" NEC FE1250+	21" NEC MultiSync FE2111SB	21" NEC MultiSync FE2111SB	22" Viewsonic P225f	22" Viewsonic P225fb	21" Dell P1130	21" Gateway VX1120
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D	Logitech Z-680	Klipsch ProMedia 4.1	Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	Altec Lansing ADA-995	Boston Acoustics BA7800
Keyboard	Multimedia keyboard	Logitech Elite Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	Logitech Cordless Freedom optical keyboard	Dell multimedia keyboard (PS2)	Cordless iTouch Keyboard
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	Logitech Mouseman dual optical mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	Microsoft optical mouse	N/A	Logitech optical mouse	Cordless optical mouse
Notes	There were artifacts on the screen during IL-2 Sturmovik testing; Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast had to be played in Windows 98/ME compatibility mode; I ran into some stability issues running Dungeon Siege and IL-2 Sturmovik.	Ships with a Glycol-filled radiator that's attached to the fans on the top. Its purpose is to keep the overclocked graphics card cooled; machine also ships with Power Strip preinstalled (a utility that allows system builders to overclock the Radeon 9700 Pro). There were artifacts on the screen during IL-2 Sturmovik testing.	The Asus P4T533-C motherboard is fast, but at press time Asus had yet to release the new BIOS that will have support for Intel's new Hyper-Threading technology.	This machine is about as by-the-book as possible; not only does the motherboard support Hyper-Threading, but it wasn't overclocked at all.	A lot of fans (this machine is loud); USB and FireWire ports on front are convenient. Can I say that I fully understand the thinking behind the temperature thing: Dungeon Siege paused and skipped at 1600x1200x32 w/ 4X FSAA	Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast had to be played in Windows 98/ME compatibility mode; Compared to the others, this machine lacks style, but I love all the USB ports.	I like the DVD-ROM /DVD-R drive, however it should've shipped with a 3GHz processor.
Core Clock	391.5MHz	376.5MHz	330MHz	N/A	324MHz	N/A	N/A
Memory Clock	337.5MHz	327MHz	333MHz	N/A	310.5MHz	N/A	N/A

BENCHMARKS*

Quake III: Arena	**231.30**	207.90	214.20	214.80	[redacted]	206.70	207.30
Comanche 4	58.78	58.49	58.03	**59.47**	54.00	57.34	52.03
Serious Sam: TSE	**96.70**	92.60	93.10	[redacted]	87.00	88.0	85.70
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	139.10	**165.60**	144.20	137.50	134.00	132.00	127.10
Dungeon Siege	87.73	71.30	**90.82**	65.79	85.00	81.84	77.53
IL-2 Sturmovik	72.08	71.68	72.87	**79.54**	68.00	[redacted]	65.19
Unreal Tournament 2003	**76.65**	66.98	65.23	64.91	67.00	60.27	59.58
NASCAR 2002	50.12	25.82	**52.35**	50.37	[redacted]	39.73	39.52

*All of the benchmarks were run at a resolution of 1024x768x32 with 4X FSAA.

Dell put together a machine that's not so much a sexy paramour as a good, trustworthy wife. The 3GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM, 200GB hard drive, and Radeon 9700 Pro will meet all your gaming needs for some time, and you can be confident that the company will be around to continue supporting you for quite a while.

One consistent knock against Dell is its machines' use of proprietary motherboards. Another major problem I have with this Dell is its case design. The thing is a pain to open, requiring the user to push a button on the top and bottom simultaneously, then pull. And because you have to lay it on its side to open it, you can't really use the machine with its case opened—not to mention that the highly specialized design of the case makes it nearly impossible to upgrade the motherboard.

One plus for the case is its front-panel USB ports in addition to the bank of USB ports on the back. The Dimension 8250 was also one of two machines to ship with the Audigy2 soundcard.

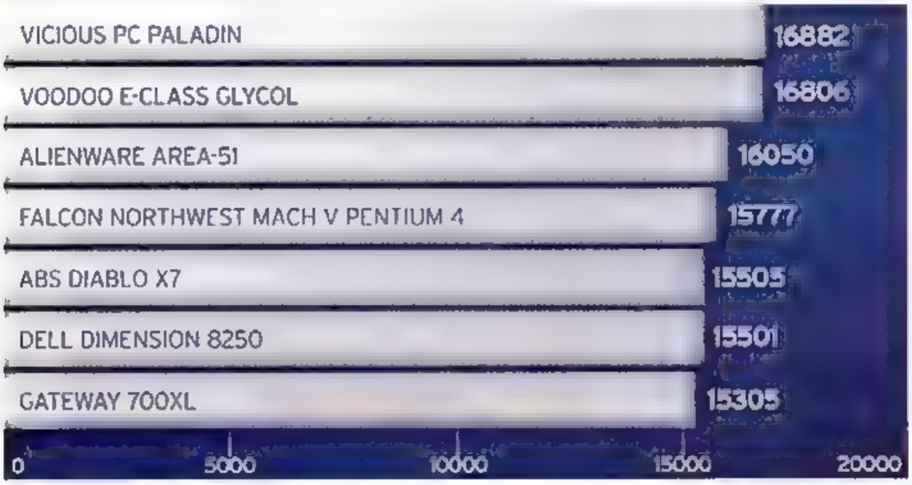
Dell is the Microsoft of desktop manufacturers: The company is so big and powerful, it's able to get new peripherals before anyone else, and therefore able to roll out new technology quickly. Its size, too, is reassuring, in that you know that you're not getting a rig from a fly-by-night operation.

GATEWAY 700XL

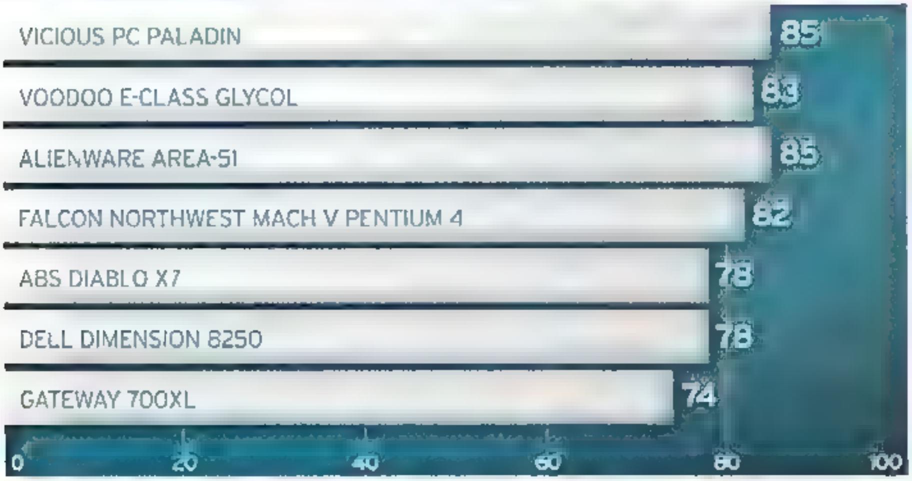
To say that we were disappointed with the Gateway 700XL—which sports a 2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4, 512MB of Samsung PC 1066 RDRAM, a Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card, and Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition—is an understatement. (Hey, wait—that's last year's intro!) While Gateway has improved its components, its efforts pale in comparison to those of the other contenders.

What the 700XL has going for it is 400GB of storage in a dual 200GB hard drive RAID config and a DVD-RAM/DVD-R drive. Cool, but not cool enough to really compete with the other machines here.

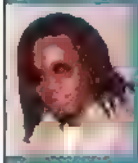
Because it ships with the Radeon 9700 Pro, its performance numbers—while not necessarily on par with the higher end machines—are pretty good, and the 700XL is suitable for gaming purposes. And, unlike the Dell, I actually found the Gateway's case easy to open up, though upgrading the motherboard would still be a major pain. As for the other peripherals, I like the cordless keyboard and mouse, and its 21-inch monitor is among the nicer ones.



3DMark2001 SE Pro 1024x768x32; no FSAA



3D GameGauge 3.0 1024x768x32; no FSAA



WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Whither My Beloved Sanity

After laboring in the lab testing the seven machines in this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine story, I turned in the text (a mere 800 words over my word count) and slunk off to Beale Street, Ziff Davis' not-so-official pre/during/post-work watering hole, to "forget" the experience.

As I worked on my second pint of Budweiser, Ken Brown, CGW's editor, came in holding a printout of my story with a look on his face that seemed to say, "We need to talk."

"Uh-oh," I thought. "It's not every day that your boss tracks you down in a bar. This ain't good."

"What's up, Ken?" I said, trying to sound as tough as possible. The theory being, if I sounded as though I was annoyed by his invading my beer drinking, he wouldn't think that I was running away from something. When, in fact, I was.

"Hey Wil," he started, "I have some questions regarding how you ranked these machines. You got a minute?"

Essentially, Ken was grappling with the same issue that I had been dealing with in the lab: How the hell do you rate these machines in a way that's fair to all? On one hand, the Vicious machine was the fastest. But it also overclocked the graphics card more than anyone else, and it showed a couple of (unrepeatable) instability issues.

"Can we give the nod to a machine that kicked two games out to the desktop?" he asked me.

After much deliberation, we decided that since the main parameter of the competition is raw speed—yes, we can. Because when it comes down to it, the UGM is a drag race, not the Winston Cup.

UGM is a drag race, not the Winston Cup.

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Gamer's Edge

Winning for dummies Edited by Dana Jongewaard

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

In honor of the fourth installment in our series of Encyclopedia WarCraftica (see page 151), we bring you yet another dirty trick for *WarCraft III*, this time courtesy of Michael Kanik.

[illegible]

[illegible]

WIN

BATTLEFIELD
1942

For your devious nature, Michael, you'll be receiving a copy of *Battlefield 1942*—now you can practice evil deeds while playing against the Germans. All of our other fair readers, send in tricks for current games like *Medieval: Total War* and *NOLF2*, and you'll be the next to receive a copy of the entertaining *Battlefield 1942*!

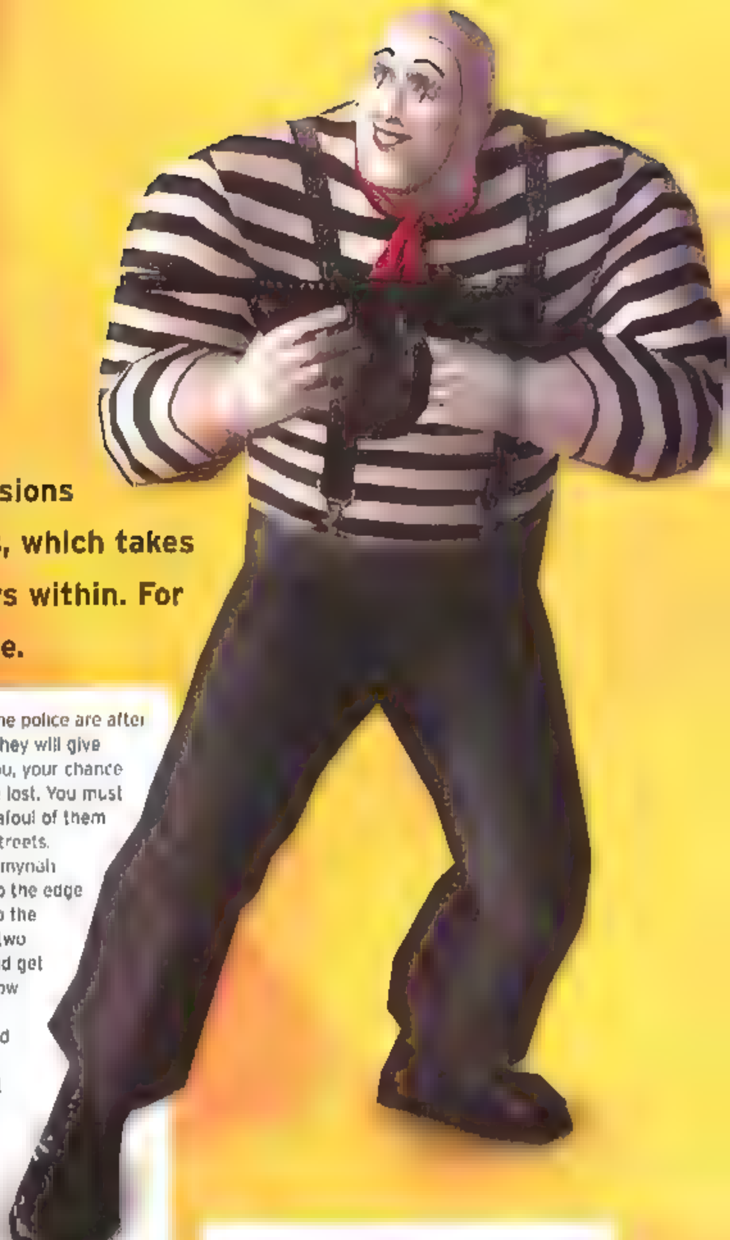
No One Lives Forever 2

Cate's back

PAGE 142

No One Lives Forever 2

Prima helps you through the hardest parts of India



The following excerpts take you through the trickier parts of one of the more difficult missions in *NOLF2*: the seventh mission, Double Cross, which takes place in India. Be careful, as there are spoilers within. For more help, check out Prima's full official guide.

Scene 1: Knife in the Back

In the opening cut-scene, a mysterious figure has appeared in H.A.R.M. headquarters. This giant mime is Pierre, one of the world's foremost assassins. Volkov has brought him in for a very special job–your assassination.

Scene 2: The Password

Meanwhile, Magnus Armstrong has contacted his friend Kamal, a disillusioned H.A.R.M. operative. Kamal is willing to help UNITY. Although he's not familiar with Project Omega, he believes there may be some important information in the central vault of H.A.R.M.'s Indian headquarters. Bruno thinks that the best way to get into the vault is not by a direct assault. Instead, you're going undercover. Your task is to join H.A.R.M. and thereby gain access to their vaults.

You start down the streets of Calcutta with Armstrong. A mysterious figure approaches and, after a short chase, confesses that he was sent by Kamal to find you. As he's about to tell you where Kamal is, a knife appears in his back, and the huge mime you saw in the cut-scene runs off down a side street.

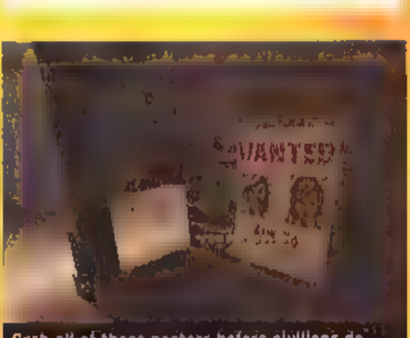
Worse, the police see you and Magnus standing over the body of the fallen man and naturally assume that you are responsible for his death. You've now got to locate Kamal without being seen by the police, who are trying their best to apprehend you.

As the scene starts, you hear one of Santa's mynah birds tell you that the police are after you. If the police see you, they will give chase, and, if they catch you, your chance to infiltrate H.A.R.M. will be lost. You must be very careful not to run afoul of them as you move through the streets.

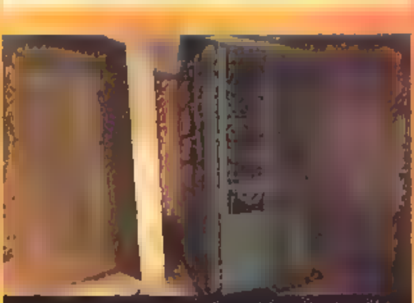
Walk forward toward the mynah bird and turn right. Move to the edge of the building and listen to the conversation between the two police officers. Lean out and get a look at them so you'll know what they look like; all the police wear white shirts and khaki pants. When done speaking, they walk off. Let them go and walk behind them. Go through the first large arch to your right.

You will pass by several people on your right. Talk to the first one. He tells you that a man bought a pink carnation from him recently, and he gives you an envelope. Read it. It's a note from Kamal that says some agents of Evil Alliance have discovered he's passing information to UNITY. Continue forward. Keeping your eyes open for police officers, walk up to the closed gate and pick the lock. Walk through and look left. You find a staircase leading down. Creep down and get out your nail clipper lockpick. While unlocking the door, you hear a rather disturbing conversation on the other side. Once the lock is picked, pull out your pistol and open the door.

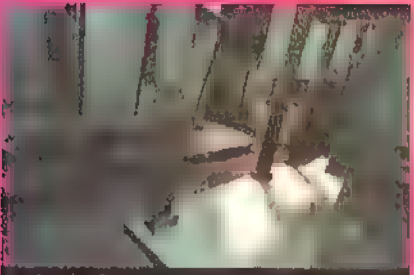
Shoot the man who charges out at you and grab his tulwar. Explore the entire room and pick the lock on the door. Behind it, you find the evidence that will save Kamal from trouble with his H.A.R.M. superiors. When finished here, return to your starting position. Continue straight. You see a man in white clothing standing ahead of you in the distance.



Grab all of these posters before civilians do.



This is the phone booth Kamal is referring to, which triggers the last segment of the mission.



When these cops are done talking, you can run into the archway past them.

This is Kamal. Go up and speak with him. Kamal gives you a map and tells you he's planted material for you in a newspaper box. He also gives you 50 rupees so you can get past Crazy Harij.

Return to the flower vendor. Take the left down the alley near him and go around the next corner to your right. Wait here for a minute. There's a policeman on patrol in the area, and you must wait for him to walk past from left to right. Once he's gone, walk out to the street and turn left. Walk to the man by the large gate and talk to him. This is Crazy Harij, and he lets you pass because you've given him the 50 rupees Kamal gave you.

Once through the gate, look left. There's a newspaper box here. Open it and get the bug that Kamal left you. One of Santa's mynah birds gives you details on how to use the bug. Move back to the gate to hear a conversation between a policeman and Crazy Harij, then back away. That policeman will be walking into this area in just a moment. The best way to hide is to run past the newspaper box and open the door to the right. Run to the end of this alley and wait for the policeman to appear and walk past before leaving.

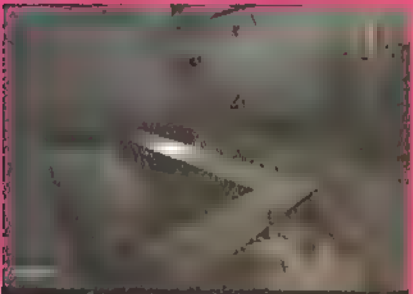
A H.A.R.M. agent named Balaji Malpani appears. He's in charge of H.A.R.M.'s passwords. Malpani is on his way to his hotel, located in another part of town. You must beat him there so you can use the bug.

Malpani is staying at the Hotel Happy Guest, around the corner from where you spoke to Kamal. Run there now—you should easily arrive before Malpani. His room is on the second floor, on the left from the stairs. Plant the bug, then go into the next room and wait.

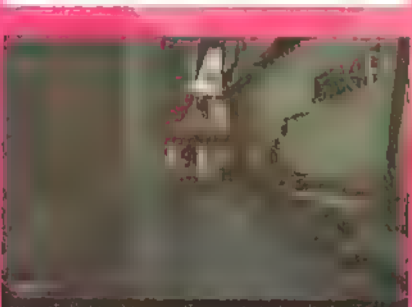
Malpani comes to his room and speaks with someone on the phone. While he does this, pull out your pistol and lean around the corner. Listen to the entire conversation and, as soon as it's over, put a bullet in Malpani's head. Now listen to the tape. Also, search Malpani's body for the key to his safe.

Open Malpani's safe. It contains a note that suggests the password "mulligatawny" might not be the one that's currently in use at H.A.R.M. headquarters. Now armed with two possible passwords, you're ready to infiltrate the H.A.R.M. base.

Walk back down the stairs in the hotel. There's a policeman walking a beat outside. Wait until you see him walk past the hotel from left to right before leaving. Go left on the street, past where you met Kamal and then past your

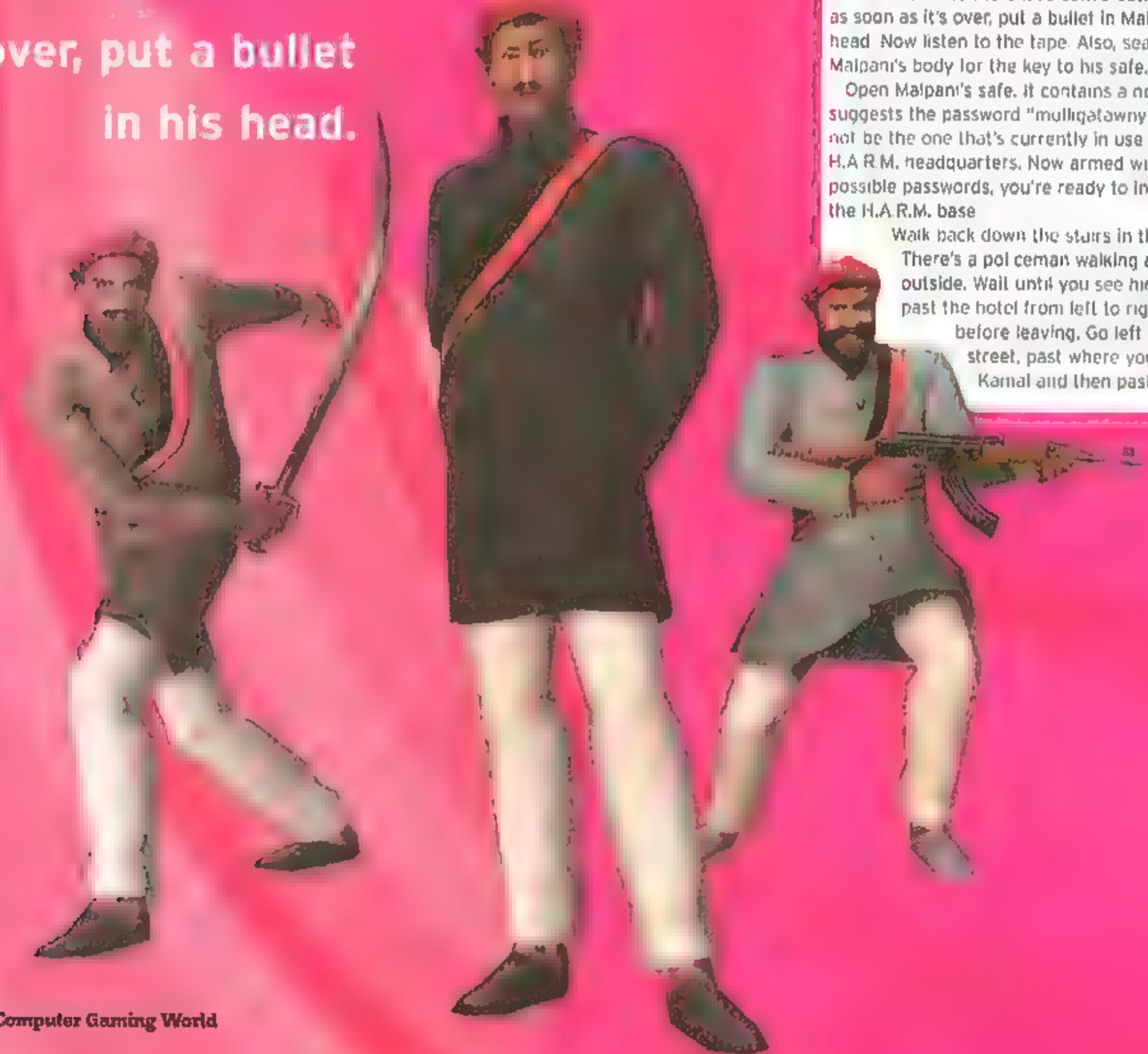


Use the nail clipper lockpick on this door.



There's Kamal in the distance. Talk to him to get your next objective.

When conversation is over, put a bullet in his head.



starting location. Continue all the way back to the gate where you spoke with Crazy Harij.

Watch out for the policeman on the other side of Crazy Harij's gate. When you can, run straight ahead and around the corner. To avoid this policeman, stand near the gate you opened earlier and wait for him to walk past from right to left. When he does, run back to the main street and go right all the way to the end. There's a large gate in front of you. To the left of this, on the last door on the main street, is a peephole. Open it and give the password to the guard to complete this scene.

Scene 3: Planting a Bug

The man at the gate denies that you've entered a H.A.R.M. facility, or that they have a chief of security, and even any knowledge of H.A.R.M. itself. However, he does tell you that the office of the man you think is the chief of security, Anoop Banerjee, is on the second floor and that he'll retrieve him for you.

Just after the man leaves, Kamal gives you another bug and tells you that you must plant it on Banerjee's office phone. You've got to get in, plant the bug, listen to the conversation, and return before anyone knows you are gone.

Turn right and walk down the hall, all the way around the grating. Open the double doors at the end and walk through. This takes you to another open atrium. In this room, there's a door to your left that leads to a hallway, but the guard on the other side won't let you pass. Don't worry about this. Go up the short staircase in the room and then through the door on the left. This takes you to a long hallway.

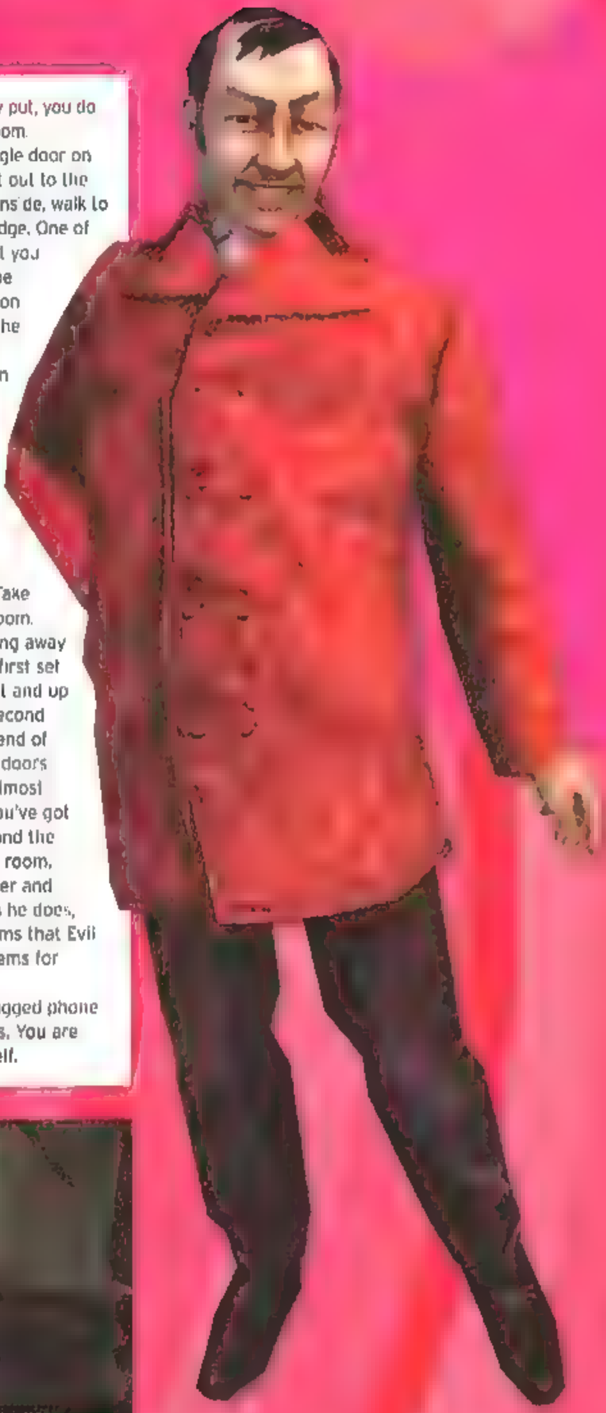
Left in the hallway is a locked gate guarded by a large thug. To your right is a double door that's guarded, and at the end of the hall is another door. Enter this door, which leads to a bathroom; although you are supposed to stay put, you do have permission to use the bathroom.

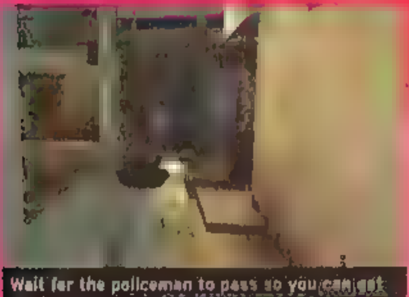
The bathroom is behind the single door on the right. From there, you can get out to the grounds surrounding the house. Inside, walk to the window and jump onto the ledge. One of Santa's mynah birds tells you that you must avoid being seen, or you'll be taken back to your starting position and will have to try again. Go to the end of the ledge and drop to the ground below. Hug the building on your left. Walk straight across, still hugging the wall, and go around the corner to your left. Take the first door ahead to the left. You're inside the building again and very close to Banerjee's office.

Back inside, follow the hallway around the corner to the right. Take the first left into a large, open room. The guards here should be looking away from you, so run quickly up the first set of stairs. On the landing, go right and up the second set of stairs to the second floor. Banerjee's office is at the end of this hallway through the double doors.

Plant the bug on the phone. Almost immediately, the phone rings. You've got to hide. The best location is behind the screen in the back corner of the room. Wait until the conversation is over and Banerjee leaves the room. When he does, go listen to the recording. It seems that Evil Alliance has been causing problems for H.A.R.M. again.

Once you've listened to the bugged phone conversation, the scene switches. You are taken in to meet Banerjee himself.





Wait for the policeman to pass so you can get to Crazy Harij.

Grab the bug from the newspaper box.

Here's the Hotel Happy Guest, where you need to either plant the bug...

...or just shoot Malpani in the head. Either way, you snag the password.

You'll see a locked gate guarded by a large thug.

As you may expect, Banerjee denies working for H.A.R.M. and also denies any knowledge of Evil Alliance. You suggest that you can bring him the contents of the Evil Alliance safe and destroy their operation. After a moment's hesitation, Banerjee agrees that such a deed would guarantee employment.

Scene 4: Wanted

The ultimate goal in this mission is to infiltrate the headquarters of Evil Alliance. However, you've got a problem. The police are starting to put up wanted posters of you and Magnus, and neither of you blend in with the crowd in Calcutta. To start, you must follow the police man walking his beat and remove the wanted posters before civilians can recognize you. You must also avoid being spotted by the police.

The first poster is easy; the policeman puts it up right next to where Armstrong is standing. Wait for the cop to walk away, then go get it. While you are waiting, get your purse from Armstrong, who is more than a little perturbed you made him hold it. You'll get the utility launcher. Put a tracer on the cop with the posters. Stay here for a bit and lean around the corner.

The cop walks away from you and puts up a poster. When he's done, he walks back toward you and places another one before turning up another street. Wait for him to place these two posters, then run and get both. Grab one more a little farther up the street when the second cop turns around. Go back toward your starting location and turn right at the corner.

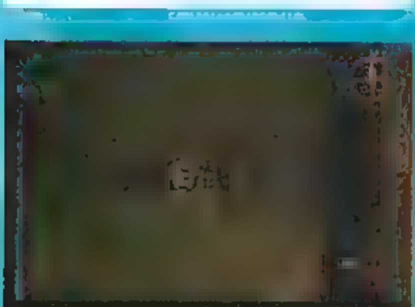
When you turn around after grabbing the third poster, you see a man standing in front of you. Walk to him and turn right down the alley he is by. Follow it to the end, go right, and get the poster you see on the post by the road.

The cop you are tailing has walked off to your left. Peek out to the right. There's another cop here. Wait for him to turn around, then follow the first cop and grab the poster at the end of the street. Follow the corner to the right. Get the next poster a little farther on. Turn left and run until you have a choice of going left or right.

The cop has gone right, so you should go left. Peek around the corner to the left and wait for him to place another poster. When he's done, go grab it. Follow him around the block and wait for him to hang the last poster. While he is doing this, return to your starting location. Watch out for the policemen patrolling the area.

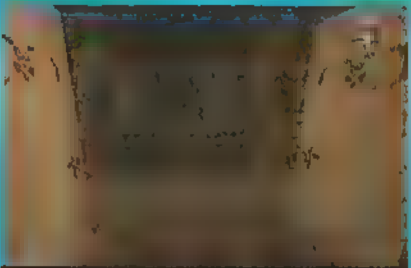
Go past where you grabbed the second poster. You pass a boarded-up movie theater. At the end of the street, you find a gate, which you may have to unlock and open. Beyond it, locate the last wanted poster. Grab it, and Crazy Harij comes to talk to you. He tells you that Kamal wishes to speak with you, but Harij doesn't remember where Kamal is. Kamal can be in many different locations, you must comb the city carefully to find him.

Once you locate Kamal, talk to him. He tells you that there is an out-of-order phone booth near the movie theater. He also gives you the combination for the lock. Make your way back to the theater. The phone booth is across the street from the theater. It's blue and difficult to miss. Inside, you find a note from Kamal telling you that the abandoned theater is the Evil Alliance headquarters. Also in the package are a note and a map from Santa. When ready, leave the phone booth and walk past the theater. Use the hairspray welder to burn the lock off the door just past the theater. Walk forward to complete this scene.


Give the right password, and the guard lets you right on in.

Kamal lets you know that you need to plant a bug on Banerjee's phone.

Ignore this guard and turn right; the bathroom is there, which is your ticket to sneaking around.


This is Banerjee's office; plant the bug and hide behind the screen in the corner.

MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR

Mano a mano

Bruce and Tom fight for Europe in the Middle Ages in three custom battles, one set in each period (Early, High, Late), with 5,000 florin budgeted per battle per side. They must choose a different faction each game. To avoid the inevitable "defender camps atop the nearest hill" scenario, the map will be flatcoastal01 with a randomly chosen terrain type. The loser of each game will choose whether to attack or defend for the next game. For the first game, Tom wins the coin toss and chooses to defend.

GAME ONE

The Early Period

Bruce's Poles attack

Tom's Almohads

Bruce's pregame

Early units are all pretty much the same, so I just go with the Poles and choose a core of 4x100 spearmen. With their good defense but poor attack, they'll advance but won't contact Tom's troops. 4x60 feudal men-at-arms and 2x40 feudal foot knights will carry the attack. I split my cavalry between light and heavy units: 2x40 alan mercenaries and 2x40 feudal knights, respectively. My king will ride with 20 royal knights, who have the same values as the feudal knights. I pump every unit up with 1 point of valour and use the leftover points (and single remaining slot) on a single unit of 100 fanatics. Their high attack and morale values make them a good, cheap unit to throw in once the battle starts going my way. I skipped missile units because the ones available in the Early Period, archers, aren't really worth it.

Tom's pregame

We're in the middle of the desert in the 15th century and Bruce has chosen the Poles, probably out of some misguided obligation to the Geryk family name. I intend to show him that his Polish army doesn't belong here by selecting the indigenous Almohads. My basic plan is to have a heavy complement of missile units to back up a core of foot soldiers. My front line will be formed from 240 Almohad urban militia units, each with valour cranked up to 3. These guys are expensive, but they're heavily armored and have a high enough attack value to counterattack anyone who engages them. I'll support them with 360 desert archers, who will shred approaching Poles and then retreat behind the line of militia. My general will stay out of the way with 20 ghulam bodyguards. I spend extra florin upgrading the archers' weapons.

Outcome

Bruce wins. Bruce's valour: 3,214. Tom's valour: 1,510. 514 out of 620 of Tom's Almohads lost to 302 out of 600 of Bruce's Poles lost. The Almohad general was killed, and the Almohads were routed.

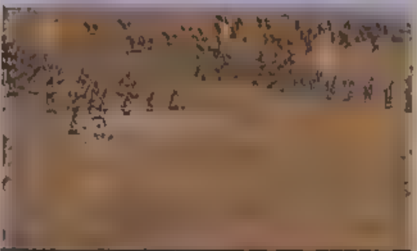
Bruce's postgame

Since I didn't have missile units, I attacked during a sandstorm to reduce the effectiveness of any ranged attackers Tom might have chosen. Good decision. I kept my light cavalry close to my advancing infantry and on the flanks, and was able to charge Tom's archers while they were unprotected. As that happened, I marched my spearmen up to Tom's infantry, who were spread across a short front since they consisted of only four 60-man units. I was easily able to outflank them while his archers fled in disarray. The panic became infectious, and I was able to use light cavalry to kill a lot of units they would have been unable to touch otherwise. If you can get units to start running, you can keep them running much more easily. It's the concept of inertia applied to morale!

Tom's postgame

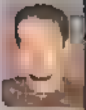
"Shoots poorly in bad weather." That's one of the data entries for my archers, who were loosing their arrows into a sandstorm. Lovely. Also, I had them too far forward, because when Bruce charged them with cavalry, not all of them could get back in time, and they started taking casualties. Suddenly, my archers were running around like idiots while Bruce's Polish horsemen rode them down. I used my only cavalry, the ghulam bodyguards, to hit some of his cavalry from the side. Before I knew it, my bodyguards were outnumbered and tangled up. This got my general killed and left Bruce free to wrap his infantry around my surviving militia. Focusing so much money on ranged units was a waste of florin, considering they barely had a chance to fire their arrows. I'm choosing to defend in the next game. This time, I'll be ready for Bruce's light cavalry.

Firing arrows in the sandstorm.



Archers in flight.

The Poles overwhelm the Almohads.



Bruce's Essential Tips

[illegible] avily armo[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] that are go[illegible] [illegible] teful. Puttin[illegible]

GAME TWO

The High Period

Bruce's Byzantines attack Tom's Turks

Bruce's pregame

Once again, we're on a desert map. I chose the Byzantines because of their heavy cavalry which I want to use to break Tom like so many Turkish aspirations in front of Vienna. It's not exactly the Middle Ages, but the spirit fits.

I can't pronounce *pronoiai allagion*, but I know what they do, and two of them plus 2x40 kataphraktoi give me a serious heavy cavalry force with which to charge Tom down. It's a little foolish to put a bunch of heavy cavalry in the desert where they tire quickly, but I plan to conserve their energy and charge only when it matters most. I'm still not a fan of missile units, but naphtha throwers cause fear, so I hope to be able to disconcert Tom's front line with a pair of these units, and then follow up with a cavalry charge. Three varangian guards, four Byzantine infantry, and two spearmen round out my force. I give both spearmen and one Byzantine extra valour. I have a lot of elite units who ignore nonelite routers, so I can safely press home attacks without worrying about my weaker units causing my stronger ones to rout.

Tom's pregame

Time for my young Turks to send Bruce's Byzantines sailing back to Byzantium. This time, no missile units. Instead, I'm going to base my defense on a wide, strong front line. The line will alternate between powerful Saracen infantry for strength and peasants for filler, to ensure I can't be outflanked. Whereas my militia from the Early Period had only 60 men, these Saracens and peasants have 100 men and can spread out more. Since they're the cornerstone of my defense, I boost the Saracen valour to 3. I buy three units of ghulam cavalry to secure my flanks and a squad of ghulam bodyguards to accompany my general.

Outcome

Tom wins. Tom's valour: 2,750. Bruce's valour: 850. 558 out of 864 of Bruce's Byzantines lost to 454 out of 1,040 of Tom's Turks lost. The Byzantine general fled, and the Byzantines were defeated.

Bruce's postgame

My naphtha throwers' range was so short that by the time they were almost in range to attack, Tom just advanced and caught them, so I wasn't able to follow up a kataphraktoi charge. My attempts to cause his peasants to flee just led me into a Saracen infantry sandwich, as his peasants backed off and he converged his infantry on my attackers. My Byzantine infantry didn't have the morale to withstand that kind of cauldron. Since my heavy cavalry was too slow to maneuver around behind, I had to settle for some frontal assaults, which Tom withstood. The desert didn't help, either.

Tom's postgame

As I surveyed his approaching army with my cursor, I realized that all of Bruce's units sounded like pasta dishes. This can be a problem with all the different units in *Medieval*: If you don't know what's coming at you, you have to wait for those internal tool tips to slowly cycle through their vague descriptions. Luckily, I knew what those naphtha throwers were, and I was able to intercept them before they could cause any damage. Once I got my men back in line, it became a straight-up, head-to-head fight. Since Bruce went for the easy targets first—the peasants—I was able to draw his attackers in and collapse the Saracen infantry on them. The ghulam cavalry at my flanks seemed an effective deterrent to keep Bruce from trying to get around me. This was a textbook example of how sometimes, the best course of action for the defender is to just stay put.

Saracen valour holds out against the onslaught.

Saracens grappling with Byzantines.

Tom's ghulam cavalry hold back Bruce's flanking attempts.

Tom's Essential Tips

[illegible] buying weapons, armo [illegible] for you [illegible] mysterious [illegible] it's really quite simple. Each point of [illegible] adds +1 to a [illegible] armor [illegible] unit's defense and armor value. However, eac [illegible] attack and bonu [illegible] unit's morale [illegible] is progressively higher. [illegible] most [illegible] for your [illegible] but this isn't always t [illegible]

Using your cavalry to strike at weaker opponents, [illegible] ctical to [illegible] ack value [illegible]

[illegible] simply hold the [illegible] armor. In addi [illegible] toward [illegible]

GAME THREE

The Late Period

Bruce's Italians attack Tom's English

Bruce's pregame

I feel more comfortable on the offensive, even though this time, I'm taking the Italians. I like the Italian infantry, so I take 3x100 of those. I also like the Hospitaller knights, so I take 2x40 of the cavalry and 2x40 of the infantry. These are all tough shock troops. If Tom is playing the English, he's bound to take longbowmen, though, so I'll need to have plenty of fast cavalry to hunt them down or my knights will get slaughtered, just like at Agincourt. 4x40 mounted sergeants should suffice. I spend my few remaining florin to give the infantry a point of valour.

Tom's pregame

OK, you'd think I would have learned my lesson about missile units in the Early Period, but I can't resist the English longbowmen, who are archers without equal. I'll take a pair. The Late Period also offers firearms like the handgunners and arquebusiers. I take two of each. Hopefully, Bruce will buy a lot of heavy metal again, and I'll have an opportunity to throw ammunition at him. The Late Period also offers some superlative anticavalry units, particularly Swiss pikemen. I take two regular pikemen, two Swiss pikemen, and two Swiss armored pikemen. Now it's time to pray for no rain, since firearms will be useless in wet weather. No matter what the initial report says, weather can change over the course of a battle, so spending so many florin on firearms is a risky proposition. I wish someone would hurry up and invent the plastic tarp.

Outcome

Bruce wins. Bruce's valour: 960. Tom's valour: 680. 516 out of 880 of Tom's English lost to 361 out of 620 of Bruce's Italians lost. The English general fled, and the English were defeated.

Bruce's postgame

Since we're in temperate terrain, the plain is broken up with a few forests. Tom has arranged his troops with either flank anchored by a forest, so there's some maneuvering here before the battle is joined. By the time I emerged from the tree line, you'd think my troops had never seen firearms before, by the way they broke and ran. I was able to rally them quickly, though, and followed up with a deadly Hospitaller charge that routed his gunners for good. Meanwhile, my light cavalry kept Tom's longbowmen on the move and unable to fire, and eventually trapped and annihilated them. Once a battle is joined (especially on flat terrain where archers can't get a range advantage), it will usually become so chaotic that the missile units will eventually get tangled up in melee, which almost always means curtains for them. If you have heavy units and they can survive until this point, their effect is telling.

Tom's postgame

The weather's great and the trees offer me some good defensive options. But in the process of jockeying for position, it turns out that Bruce managed to approach through a forest, which meant he had a shorter distance to cover while under fire from my longbowmen. Still, the longbowmen and firearms managed to inflict enough casualties to turn back some of Bruce's approaching infantry. Unfortunately, since I had no cavalry protecting my general other than the royal knights, I was helpless to do anything about his mounted sergeants, who kept riding around and harrying my missile units so they couldn't fire. Eventually, Bruce managed to rally the guys I'd turned back, and they were able to deploy in front of my line with only minimal interference from my ranged units. We started wheeling our armies around in flanking/counterflanking maneuvers, and he was eventually able to hit me from the side and from behind with his cavalry. This sent my pikemen running off through the trees and ruined England's chance to conquer a country with better cuisine. And this is why, when you ask people what they feel like for dinner, no one ever says, "Let's have English food tonight."

Overall Outcome

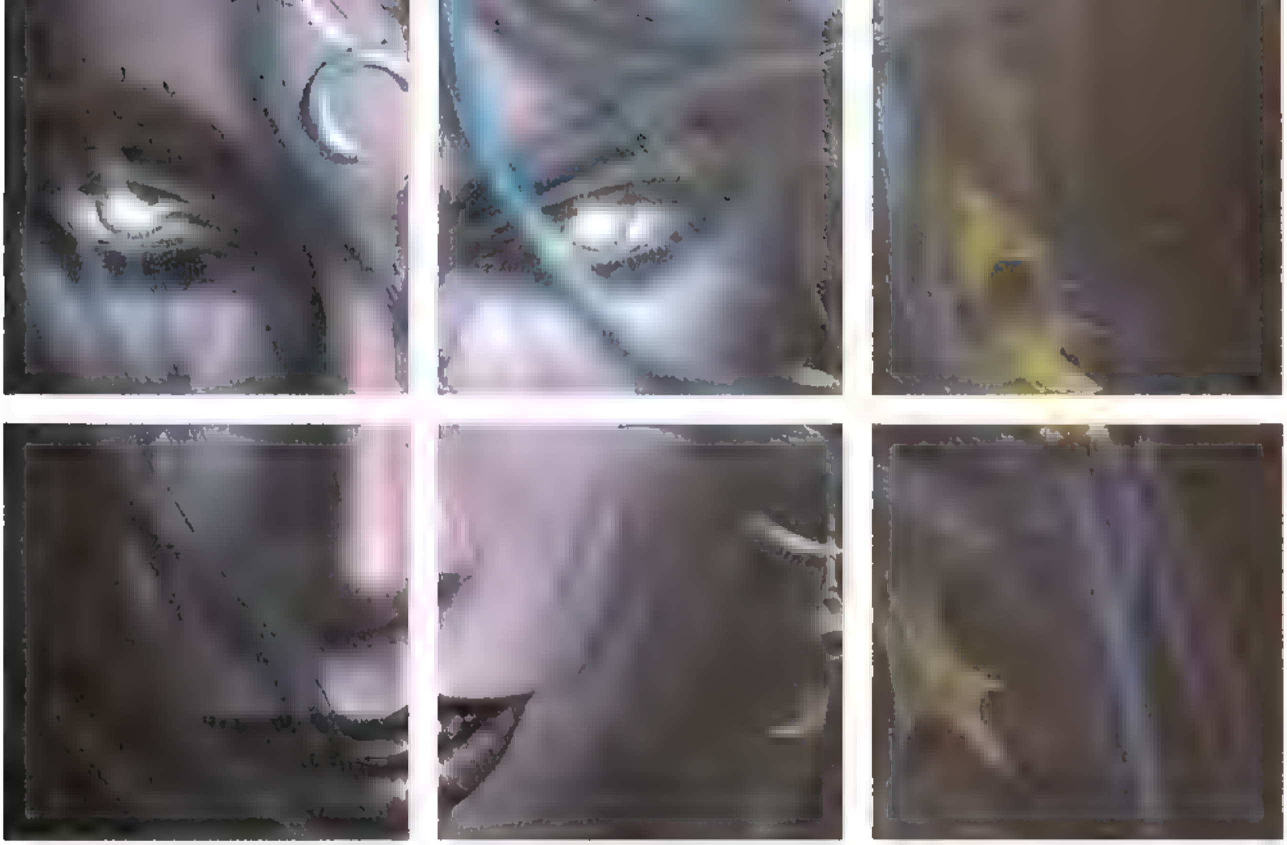
Bruce wins two victories to Tom's single victory. Tom shakes his fist and vows revenge.

The Italians approach through the trees.

English gunfire inflicts a few casualties.

Bruce's cavalry emerge from cover for a charge.

The Italians try to work their way around England's Swiss pikemen.



WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos

Secrets of the Undead By Elliott Chin

While the Human alliance and Orc horde are familiar to *WarCraft* veterans, the Undead are a completely new race for players to learn and master. They're also a fascinating faction with lots of great abilities. Here are some general tips on how to play the Undead, as well as more detailed looks at how to use spells and take advantage of the Undead strengths and compensate for their weaknesses.

Undead basics

The first unusual aspect of the Undead is their unique resource harvesting. Undead don't send peons into mines. They haunt a gold mine and then station up to five acolytes around it to siphon gold. The advantage to this is that you don't waste time bringing the gold back to your town hall, and when expanding, you don't need to build a town hall near your expansions. One aspect of the Undead economy that you shouldn't overlook is the ability to unsummon buildings. You need the acolyte to unsummon the building, but when you do so, you get back 50 percent of the building's cost. A sacrificial pit, for example, returns 100 gold and 40 wood to you. If the building you unsummon is damaged, however, you'll get fewer resources back. Use this ability when you are hurting for cash, usually after the enemy has attacked you and you're out of money for units or buildings.

Another element of the Undead that bears mentioning is the blight. Undead units only regenerate on the blight, regardless of the time of day. When off of it (which is usually always if you are on the offensive and exploring), your Undead units cannot regenerate hit points. When on the blight, they'll regenerate faster than any other race's units. After battles, it is a good idea to send severely wounded units back to the blight to recuperate.

The value of corpses

Corpses are used by necromancers to raise skeletons, by ghouls to heal hit points, and by death knights as victims for the Animate Dead spell. For raising skeletons and healing ghouls, any corpse will do, even critters. Don't overlook the seals and pigs sitting on the map. If your ghouls are hurt and there are no enemy corpses around, kill a critter and eat. If you need bodies to raise a skeleton, use a critter.

Undead can save corpses for later use with the meat wagon, which can hold up to eight corpses. You can set the meat wagon to automatically gather corpses. When held, these corpses don't decay. A good tactic is to kill critters as you explore and store them in your

If skeleton warriors are a large part of your army, Skeleton Longevity is an essential upgrade.

Use the Undead meat wagon to store corpses for later use. That way you always have a ready supply for raising skeletons and healing ghouls.

[illegible]

One weakness [illegible] lack of healing—they have no normal unit that can heal their units en masse. Undead players who want healing must commit to the death knight hero. He can be a potent means [illegible] healing [illegible] available [illegible]

Even the slow hit point regeneration available to other races is a little more [illegible]ive for the Undead, who cannot heal naturally away from the blight. To [illegible]nsate for this weakness, you want [illegible] the ghoul's Cannibalize ability, which lets this unit devour [illegible]ses to heal hit points at the rate of 10 per second. In addition, the dread lord's Vampiric Aura is a must-have, as it lets your units convert damage they deal [illegible] Vampiric Aura can heal back 45 percent of the damage your unit deals. The dread lord's Aura is very large, so a lot of your units will benefit from this healing, and it can't be dispelled like the Orc's Healing [illegible] management [illegible] only drawback is that it only affects melee units.

meat wagons. Then, just before you attack an enemy base, unload the corpses and have your necromancers raise a great army before attacking. Using the meat wagon and necromancer combo, you can give yourself a portable, instant-made army.

When stored in a meat wagon, the type of corpse is remembered. This is useful when using the death knight's Animate Dead spell. After killing particularly powerful creeps, like ogre lords, troll warlords, and centaur khans, load them onto the meat wagon. Don't let your ghouls or necromancers use them. Then, when you are ready to attack, unload them near your death knight and have him animate them. These units are as powerful as high-level units like the tauren and knight. When animated, however units lose any special abilities, spells, and upgrades they had.

Choosing a hero

When the time comes to make your choice of hero, the Undead have some interesting options. In general, the Undead heroes aren't as durable as heroes of other races, so keep them alive through careful micromanagement. While the death knight has the highest hit points of the lot and can heal your units, the dread lord is actually the best hero to recruit. He can do it all: damage multiple opponents at once, immobilize heroes, and bestow a useful aura. And his ultimate spell is awesome

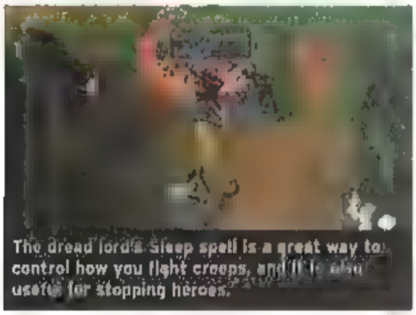
Why the dread lord is king

The dread lord gives you the ability to immobilize opponents with his Sleep spell. Early on, when you are fighting creeps, you can use it on leaders so you don't have to deal with them until after you mop up the followers. Sleep can also be very useful for taking heroes out of the fight for a short while, or stopping them as they flee. Use it also on high-level units like frost wyrms, druids of the claw, and others. Sleep is an excellent counter to high damage spells like the archmage's Blizzard and the priestess of the moon's Starfall, since the casting hero stops maintaining the spell once he is put to sleep.

Vampiric Aura is also a great first ability, as it heals your units when they deal damage. However, it only affects melee units. Because it is an aura, it also benefits units that are immune to spells, like the infernal allied dryads or your own units that are being protected by a banshee's Antimagic Shell. However, note that Vampiric Aura will not let you heal when your units are attacking creatures with natural spell immunity, like dryads and golems. Level up this skill quickly so that your units have vastly improved longevity. For quick healing after battles, attack creep buildings like tents, or your enemy's buildings—this will help you quickly regain hit points. You cannot hit your own units or buildings to regain health

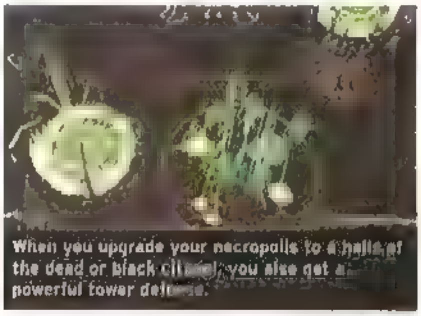
Carrion Swarm is a good second choice because it is an area effect attack, like the tauren chieftain's War Stomp. When using the dread lord, be careful with him in combat. He is a melee hero, but needs to be kept alive because his aura and spells are vital to victory in battle. Stock him up with potions of healing from the goblin merchant to ensure he lives longer. Keep the dread lord out of melee combat unless you need his strength, and make sure he doesn't get surrounded. To make him even more durable in combat, recruit a death knight as your second hero and have him use Death Coil to continually heal your dread lord when he is wounded

Leveling up your dread lord is essential, not only to get maximum Vampiric Aura but also to get the Inferno ultimate spell. You can cast this at range and it will stun all units in the area for four seconds. It also summons an infernal unit,

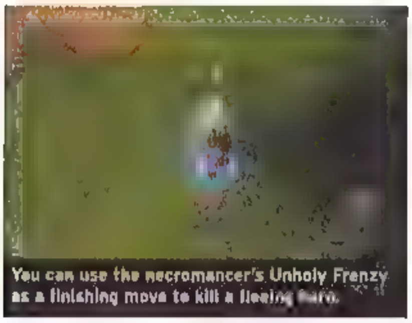


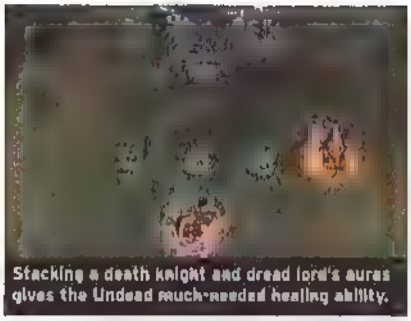
The dread lord's Sleep spell is a great way to control how you fight creeps, and it is also useful for stopping heroes.

An excellent combination is necromancers casting Unholy Frenzy on abominations while a dread lord's Vampiric Aura heals them.



When you upgrade your necropolis to a halls of the dead or black citadel, you also get a powerful tower defense.


You can use the necromancer's Unholy Frenzy as a finishing move to kill a fleeing hero.


Stacking a death knight and dread lord's auras gives the Undead much-needed healing ability.

The lich provides excellent offensive power, thanks to Frost Nova, and also adds armor-enhancing ability to your undead units.

which is a huge brute with spell immunity, 1,500 hit points and +6 armor that does 49 to 60 damage, and a permanent immolation aura that does 10 fire damage to all surrounding enemy units. It also does chaos damage (as opposed to piercing or normal damage), meaning it has full effect on all armor types. The Infernal goes away after 180 seconds, but during that time, it's a terror on the battlefield. Be aware that despite its spell immunity, it can be damaged by dispel magic spells like Abolish Magic and Purge.

The death knight

The death knight, because of his healing ability and Unholy Aura, is usually your best second choice. Death Coil ensures that you can keep your troops alive longer. Unholy Aura is also good because it improves your units' speed and gives hit point regeneration off the blight. Death Pact isn't as useful, especially because its low level version is so weak, but it's the only way to heal your death knight since he can't use Death Coil on himself. However, you often can't afford to lose units to this spell. Death Pact is really only useful if you have necromancers around to raise skeletons as fodder. His ultimate spell, Animate Dead, is useful for calling up an instant army of six corpses, but the animated bodies only last for a few minutes, and they don't have any of the special abilities they had in life.

The lich

While the death knight is usually taken second for his healing, the lich is also a worthy choice because of his high damage potential. Always choose Frost Nova first, which does damage to enemy units but also slows them for five seconds, reducing attack rate by 25 percent and speed by 50 percent. Frost Armor is a great second spell, since it beefs up a unit's armor by +3, +5, or +7, depending on the spell level. All units that attack the frost armor unit are also slowed. The lich's Dark Ritual spell is like Death Pact, except that it gives mana instead of health. Like Death Pact, it is really only useful if you have skeleton warriors to spare. But if you can use Dark Ritual, combined with the low cooldown of the Frost Nova and Frost Armor spells, you can wreak havoc on enemy units and give added armor to your whole army. The lich's ultimate spell, Death and Decay, is a great way to demolish buildings. It destroys 4 percent of a building or unit's hit points per second, but the lich must maintain the spell for its duration of 35 seconds. Use it to wipe out whole arrays of towers, clear forests, get to walled off gold mines or enemy bases, or kill units. Unlike the Orc farseer's Earthquake spell, Death and Decay does damage to units, but it also hurts your own troops, so cast it on enemy ranged units or at the back of an enemy army.

In general, Undead heroes aren't as durable as heroes of the other races; keep them alive through micromanagement.

Undead units

With your hero selected, it's time to move onto your units. The choices are pretty simple once you familiarize yourself with this race. By late game, you should use abominations over ghouls. The Undead are vastly more powerful if you use their spellcasters. Of all the races, the Undead have the highest damage potential. The abomination, crypt fiend, and frost wyrm do the most damage of any melee, ranged ground, or flying unit in the game, respectively. The gargoyle is also a quick hit-and-run unit that is a good antiair unit. Research their Stone Form ability so they last longer. They are awful in a stand-up fight against ranged ground units. One thing to consider about the mighty frost wyrm: Its high hit points and massive attack are very compelling, but don't be fooled. Unless you go with a large number of these beasts, they will be chewed apart by ranged units like dryads and riflemen. Support them with melee ground units underneath to distract enemy archers. A frost wyrm's attack also does a modest amount of splash damage and slows those hit, reducing an attack by 25 percent and movement speed by 50 percent. When making town sieges, bring along a few frost wyrms, not for their damage, but for their Freezing Breath upgrade, as it will stop building production. Units will be halted in mid build, towers will cease to function, and Night Elf buildings will be unable to uproot. Even uprooted Night Elf buildings will freeze for the five-second duration. The best thing about Freezing Breath is that it is passive; the frost wyrm's breath is always freezing once the upgrade is researched. You can actually get frost wyrms in less than 10 minutes if you rush up to it, to the exclusion of all else. And in large numbers, the frost wyrm can be hard to stop, especially if under an Unholy Frenzy spell. But, except in numbers of eight or more, the frost wyrm shouldn't be your mainstay. When you do use these units, because they are so slow to build and expensive, you'll want to have the death knight's Death Coil handy to heal them and have Frost Armor available to add armor. Of far greater benefit are the Undead spellcasters, the necromancer and banshee.

Using necromancers

The necromancer is an essential part of the Undead army. Raise Dead is an obviously powerful spell that creates two skeletons from a single corpse. It ensures that even as you lose units in battle, your army still grows and can swell to unstoppable numbers as you add the enemy's fallen to your forces. Keep necromancers in the back of your army, as they are very easy to kill. You can use meat wagons to store corpses and unload them for the necromancers just before battle to create a ready-made army on short notice.

Yet Raise Dead isn't the necromancer's best

[illegible]

[illegible] have an unmatched ability to scout out their enemies with their shade units. You [illegible] as soon as you upgrade to [illegible] halls of the dead, so you can have them very [illegible] game. Because players tend to ignore invisibility detection, you can sit a shade in [illegible] your enemy's base and he will never know. This is a great way to se[illegible] you can plan accordingly. You can also place shades near gold mines to [illegible] when the enemy starts expanding. The shade is an often overlooked unit, but [illegible] spell. Unholy Frenzy is an amazing buff for your troops, increasing attack speed by 75 percent for the cost of 4 hit points per second. A unit with a slow attack speed actually gets bumped up three levels to fast attack. Use it on high level units like abominations and frost wyrms. Don't bother using it on low hit point units like spellcasters and ghouls. The best combination for Unholy Frenzy is the dread lord's Vampiric Aura and abominations. Because the abominations do so much damage, they'll heal more than 4 hit points per hit, completely negating the Unholy Frenzy damage. One clever way to use Unholy Frenzy offensively is to cast it on highly damaged, fleeing units (obviously you don't want to cast it on the enemy when it still has enough hit points to go a few rounds of battle). The unit will suffer 4 hit points of damage per second for 45 seconds. And unlike persistent damage abilities like the wyvern's Envenomed Spear or abomination's Disease Cloud, Unholy Frenzy will kill the unit.

The necromancer's final spell is Cripple, and this is the best negative spell you can cast on a unit in the entire game. Cripple reduces attack speed and damage 50 percent, and decreases movement 75 percent. Like with most other percentage-based modifiers, the damage reduction is based off of the victim's average damage. So an enemy abomination with an average attack of 45 suffers a -22 damage penalty! And it attacks two steps slower, going from average to very slow. A combination of Unholy Frenzy on your own units and Cripple on the enemy's heavy hitters nearly guarantees Undead victory. Use this spell on enemy heroes immediately to reduce their effectiveness and to slow them down when they run.

You'll usually cast Unholy Frenzy before you enter battle, but Cripple is cast when you see the enemy. Therefore, you should turn off autocasting of Raise Dead so you don't accidentally spend mana on skeletons in battle. Use Cripple first and then resume autocast. With so many useful spells, you'll want at least five or six necromancers in your army.

Screaming Banshees

While not nearly as popular as the necromancer, the banshee is underrated and incredibly useful. Her Curse spell gives an enemy unit a 25 percent chance to miss when attacking. Used against a mob of enemy units, that works out to 1-in-4 units not even hitting your units. Having just a few banshees can turn the tide of battle. The banshee's learned spells, Anti-magic Shell and Possession, are very potent additions to your arsenal. Anti-magic Shell is the Undead's sole means of dispelling negative magic. When cast on a unit, it will cancel out any negative and positive buffs in effect on the unit, and render the unit immune to any spell for the next minute. With the banshee, the Undead are the only race that can prevent their units from succumbing to damage spells, like Storm Bolt, Chain Lightning, War Stomp, and such. Cast it on your heroes before they enter battle, since heroes are often the targets of high damage spells like those. Keep in mind that once protected by Anti-magic Shell, your unit won't be affected by beneficial spells either. Auras, though, will still benefit the unit.

Possession is the banshee's final spell and lets her control an enemy unit, although the banshee is lost in the process. You cannot possess flying units or mechanical units, or take over creeps level six and higher. Using Possession, you can break the food cap. If you are at 90 food, and you possess an enemy knight, for example, your food cap will grow to 92 (since the knight takes four food as opposed to the banshee's two). Don't waste Possession on low level units. Use it instead on Level 5 creeps with special abilities and give the Undead access to powers they don't normally possess. For example, you could possess a troll high priest and gain use of his Heal, Abolish Magic, and Inner Fire spells. Or possess an ogre mage and get Bloodlust. A good idea is to go for a creep leader with an aura, like the gnoll overseer, which has the Command Aura that gives every friendly unit in range +10 percent damage.

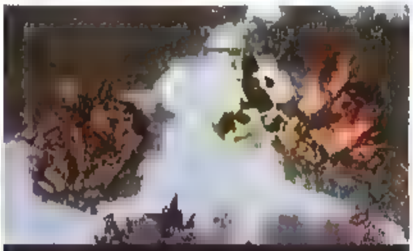
Units possessed lose any weapon and armor upgrades they had. However, possessed units still have their special abilities, so you can even possess peon units like peasants and wisps, and gain access to another race's entire lineup of abilities and heroes. With this ability, no secrets of any race are beyond the ability of the Undead to learn.

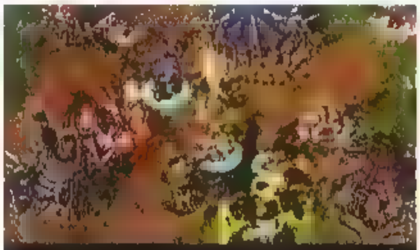
Essential Undead Abilities

When [illegible] as the Undead, there are a few abilities you definitely should research. Skeleton Longevity is a must-have if you use necromancers, as it makes skeleton warriors last a third longer. Web is also an essential ability [illegible] in the scheme of things [illegible] minimal, as it gives you an [illegible] enemy air units so [illegible] caught with your pants down [illegible] your foe rolls gryphon riders [illegible] chimaeras into your town. If you wish to use ghouls in the late game, Cannibalize and Ghoul Frenzy are also vital. However, you'll probably use abominations, in which case you should [illegible] Disease Cloud. While an infected unit can't die from the disease, it will lose up to 120 hit points. If you are fighting Undead, though, Disease [illegible] units are immune to its effects.

Undead [illegible]

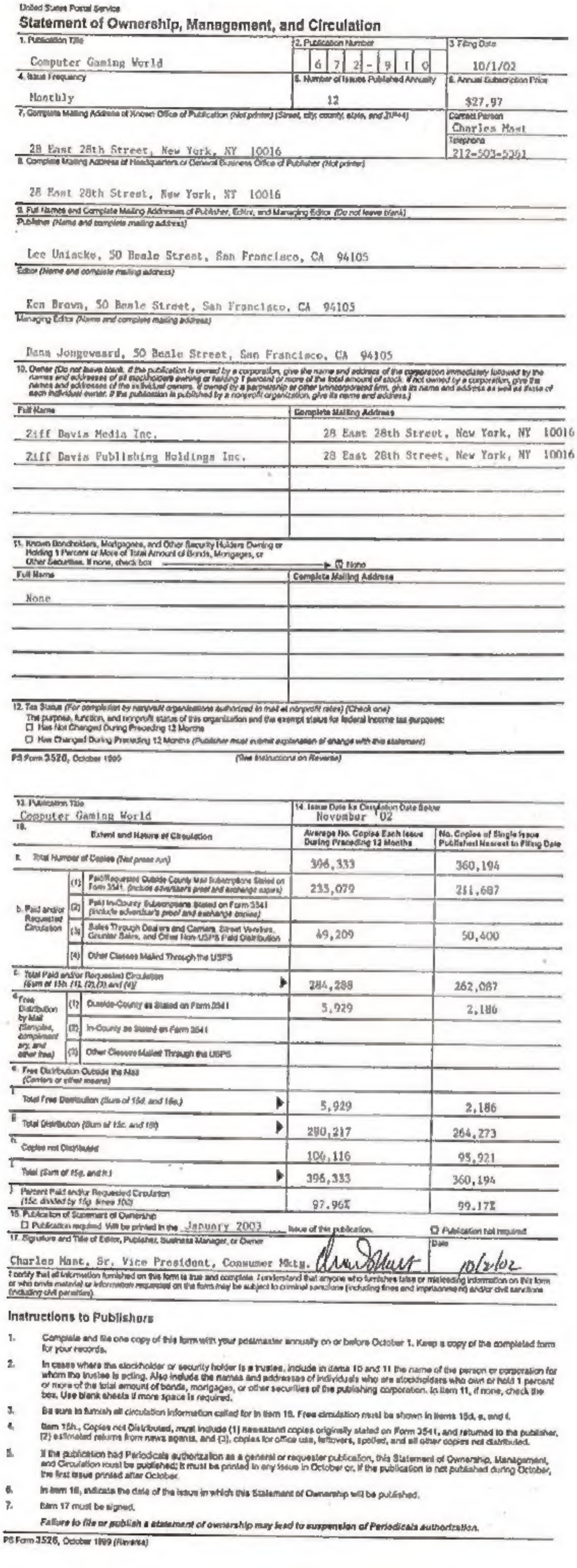
[illegible] have an easy time expanding because all they [illegible] build a haunted gold mine and [illegible] [illegible] highly vulnerable [illegible] unless you surround them with defenses [illegible] Undead. Although you don't need to build [illegible] your expansion [illegible] halls of the dead [illegible] Town Portal there [illegible] Portal to a haunted gold mine [illegible] the halls of the dead [illegible] strength spirit tower with triple hit points. When expanding, you should [illegible] ziggurats around the gold mine. Upgrade them to spirit towers and you should have excellent defenses around your base. Unsummon these buildings [illegible] resources [illegible]


The dread lord's ultimate spell, Inferno, stuns surrounding enemies and summons a massive Infernal to battle.


The dread lord offers an area affect damage spell, a hero immobilizing spell, a very useful healing aura, and a great ultimate.

The death knight is a good second hero to recruit, as his Death Coil can keep your first hero alive in the face of combat.

In a pinch you can unsummon buildings for resources.



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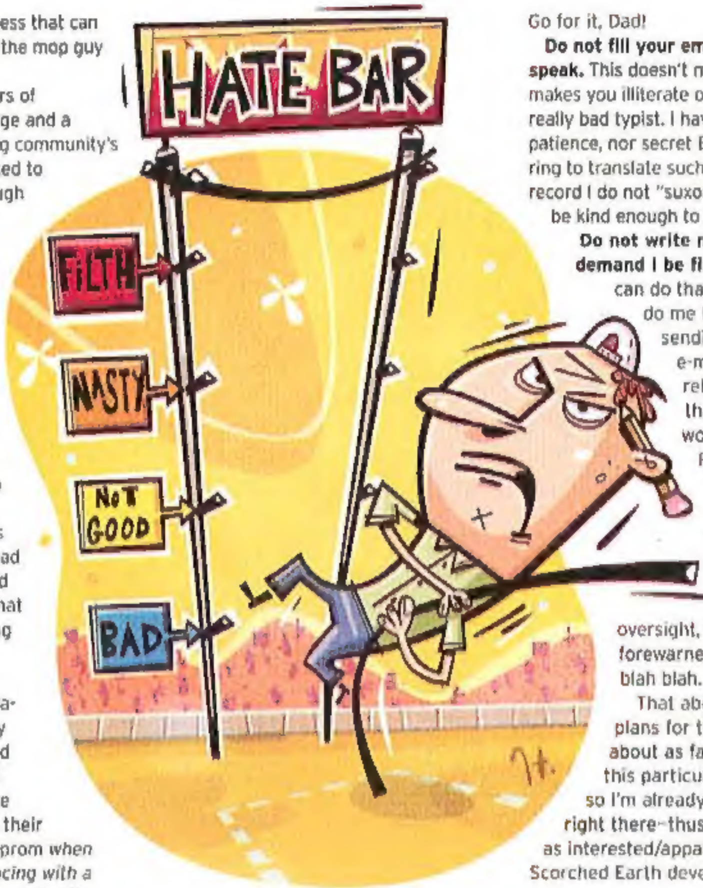
Scorched Earth

Hate Is My Anti-Drug

Yeah, I know I suck, but so do you **By Robert Coffey**



It's a level of thanklessness that can only be appreciated by the mop guy at a peep show.

After four-and-a-half years of Greenspeak owning this page and a sizable chunk of the gaming community's mindshare, I have been asked to cough up roughly just enough words each month so we'll have something to print opposite that snazzy ad on the inside back cover. It's a lot like waking up and finding out you've become Zeppo Marx.

Thanks a lot, Jeff.

Am I particularly well-suited to take over this page? Quite probably not. And I completely expect to hear about it, for months upon months upon months to come, from every sad, sad miscreant who's subscribed to this magazine so long that they can remember stuffing it into the back pocket of their rented chocolate polyester tux with the extra-wide lapels and big, droopy purple bowtie so they could read Scorpia's 5,000 word review of that RPG with the amazing ASCII graphics at their "Spirit of '76" high school prom *when they should have been dancing with a girl*. They and many others, and quite possibly you, will send me hate mail, and I, in an ill-advised act of self-flagellation, shall endeavor to answer every bitter screed. Well, within reason. There are some ground rules, so sharpen your poison pens and take some notes. The hate mail line starts over there, right behind Stevie Case.

Profanity will not be tolerated. Rather, it will be embraced. Nothing quite touches the rubbery black thing that passes for my heart like a beautifully constructed string of utter filth. Let yourself go. Get into it. Throw in a goat and a meathook and see what you can do. Unimaginative gutter-mouths, the ones whose emails start with "F**k you a**hole," will have their missives deleted faster than you can type "Bzzt" on an Internet forum.

Do not call my children chronically disturbed hellions. I'm a father, for God's sake. Don't you think I already know this about them? The truth doesn't hurt, it sets you free.

Do not accuse me of owning a three-foot Real Doll with an appendectomy scar and a lazy eye. See above about being set free.

Understand that the hate bar has been set very high. Can anyone top my mother's "Thank you for the especially excruciating new barb in the crown of thorns your life has become for me. I should have thrown you down the stairs when you were 5"? Frankly, I doubt it, but you are more than welcome to try. Go for it, Dad!

Do not fill your email with "L33t" speak. This doesn't make you cool, it makes you illiterate or, at the very least, a really bad typist. I haven't the time, patience, nor secret Bazooka Joe decoder ring to translate such gibbering. For the record I do not "suxorz," I "suck." Please be kind enough to recognize this.

Do not write my superiors and demand I be fired. Actually, you can do that just so long as you do me the courtesy of sending me your boss' e-mail address so I can return the favor. Then that's totally OK. A word of warning: Raven Software tried this after my review of the first *Soldier of Fortune* and I'm still here. Probably just an administrative oversight, but y'know, forewarned, forearmed, blah blah blah.

That about covers it. My plans for this space extend about as far as the bottom of this particular sheet of paper—so I'm already way ahead of Jeff right there—thus I'll probably be just as interested/appalled as you as Scorched Earth develops/devolves/profoundly disappoints. With luck, I will stumble upon a way to make this page more of a total fiasco and less of a tragic waste. It's going to be hard; I've got freakishly large Bozo shoes to fill. In the meantime, I'll be tap-dancing merrily down the plank, noose and albatross saucily wrapped around my neck.

And keep those cards and letters coming!

What Jeff doesn't realize is that Robert is panic-stricken, having run out of ideas after ghostwriting Greenspeak for two years now. Tell him how much you loathe him at robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com.

With luck, I'll stumble upon a way to make this page more of a total fiasco.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK HORNADY

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Blue Kingwin Aluminum Case w/Acrylic Windows & Neon Light
Enermax 330-Watt Power Supply
Asus P4T533 Intel 850E Chipset Motherboard w/533FSB & USB 2.0
Samsung 512MB 1066MHz RAMBUS Memory
Western Digital 100GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA100 Hard Drive w/8MB Cache
Pioneer 16X DVD Player & Mitsumi 1.44MB Floppy Drive
48X12X48 SMART-BURN® CD-ReWritable Drive
ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB DDR 8X AGP Video Card
Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy Sound Card & Mic
3Com PCI 10/100 Network Card & USR V.90 PCI 56K Modem
Microsoft Internet Keyboard & Optical Mouse
Microsoft Windows® XP Home Edition
Free 1 Year Onsite Service and 7/24 Tech Support
Free ABS™ PC Organizer (3" Color Binder for Manual, Drivers, etc.)

$1749

ABS™ Diablo X5

Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor at 2.80GHz with 533FSB
Black Kingwin Aluminum ATX Case w/3 Windows (Picture Shown)
Enermax 550-Watt Power Supply
Asus P4T533 Intel 850E Chipset Motherboard w/533FSB & USB 2.0
Samsung 512MB 1066MHz RAMBUS Memory
Two 80GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA 133 Hard Drives
Lite-On 16X DVD Player & Mitsumi 1.44MB Floppy Drive
Plextor 48X12X48 CD-ReWritable Drive
NVIDIA® GeForce™4 Ti 4600 w/128MB Video Card
Creative Labs SoundBlaster Audigy XGamer Sound Card w/IEEE 1394
Integrated Intel Network Controller
Black Multimedia Keyboard & Optical Mouse
Microsoft Windows® XP Professional
Free 1 Year Onsite Service and 7/24 Tech Support
Free ABS™ PC Organizer (3" Color Binder for Manual, Drivers, etc.)

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SONY 21" CPD-G520P	White	$639.00
NEC 22" FE2111SB	Black	$609.00

Speakers

Klipsch ProMedia 2.1 THX-Certified 200W	$179.00
Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 THX-Certified 500W	$349.00

Gamepad & Harness

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Gear Grip-Pro Computer Harness	$ 34.00

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6.1

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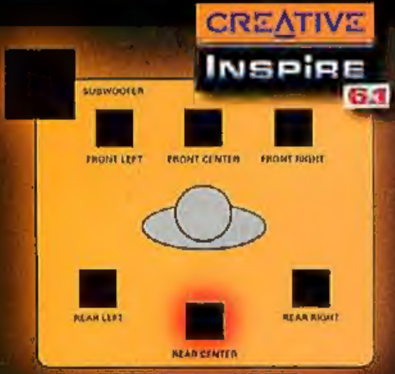
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FRONT CENTER
FRONT RIGHT
REAR LEFT
REAR RIGHT
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